



THE STEWARD'S WAY™

By: Stewardship Resource Group

103 SERIES

LIVING THE GENEROUS LIFE

EXAMINING OUR LIFE PURPOSE

CREATED TO BE GENEROUS



Often times when we see or hear about people who are extraordinarily generous, we willingly credit them with having been given the *gift of generosity*. We know Paul's teaching: "*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. ...if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously...*" (Romans 12:6, 8 NIV). We point to that generous person and conclude that God obviously has given him the gift.

But in so acknowledging their gift of generosity, we may actually be giving in to a very subtle deception that simultaneously excuses us for not being generous because we *don't have the gift*.

THE GIFT OF GENEROSITY

Gifts, like the ones mentioned in Romans 12, are simply abilities that people have been given which allow them to naturally be better at something than they should be considering the amount of time and effort they have put into it. You certainly know people who are gifted in certain areas like music, art, athletics, academics, public speaking, leadership, etc. What others have to work very hard at to become skilled, these gifted ones seem to do it effortlessly. And when they exercise their gifts, their skill levels go off the charts.

It is likely at some time in your life you have come across a youth that, as soon as he touches a ball (pick your sport) for the first time, plays like he's been doing it for years; or the student who never studies, yet gets straight A's; or the person who has never taken piano lessons, yet can play any music he or she hears; or the beginner who gets up to speak for the first time and communicates like an experienced orator. Those are gifts from God.

Does this mean that the rest of us "ungifted" people can never learn how to play ball, the piano, get good grades, paint, skillfully speak, or lead others? Not at all. But what it does mean is that some people have been "super-charged" by the Holy Spirit with a gift and the rest of us mere mortals have to work very hard to match the results these blessed ones are able to achieve so naturally.

We may see people who freely, abundantly, joyfully and even sacrificially give of themselves and what they have without any apparent reluctance, hesitation or fear. In comparison to their giving, ours is never as liberal or joyful. It is here that we can be deceived. We can mistakenly conclude that because we are not as good at giving as these *gifted* ones, we need not even try to imitate their example. If this is our thinking, we have come to the wrong conclusion.

Those that God has gifted with generosity are here to inspire and motivate us – to give us a glimpse of the incredible joy, impact and blessing that comes from being generous. God has given the gift of generosity to a few so they can serve as lighthouses to show the rest of us the way and to reassure us that it is not only safe to travel in that direction, it is absolutely the most exciting and fulfilling way to go! The generous ones are there to

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encourage us to follow the trail they have blazed!

The point is that generosity is not the exclusive domain of those *gifted* to be generous. Generosity is part of the hardwiring of every one of us. Consider this:

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

Genesis 1:26-27 and 9:6 tell us that we have been created in God's image. We are in our very essence different than everything else that God created because we have the stamp of God's nature on us. And our goal in the Christian life is to allow ourselves to be "*conformed to His image*" (Romans 8:29) – for our image to match His.

We certainly can all agree that a dominate aspect of God's nature is that He is generous and this generosity flows out of His love. John 3:16 tells us, "*For God so loved...He gave...*" And this never-ending, unconditional love is demonstrated in His giving to us. "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32) Jesus said it this way in Matthew 7:11, "*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*" Simply stated, our God is an extraordinarily generous God.

So, by the fact that we are created in God's image and God is a generous giver, we have all been created to be generous givers too!

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

Sadly though, because of our fallen state, we routinely smother our God-given generous nature. We cover it over with the lies of greed, self-interest, pride, fear and insecurity. We often find ourselves so bedeviled by our obsession with ourselves that we routinely overlook the lives and needs of others around us. The still small voice of generosity within us – that invites us to ascend to a higher place, to a higher good – is tragically drowned out by the noise of our attention-consuming, selfish pursuits.

Paul, aware that selfishness is the core sin in our life that cripples, blinds and disables us from being conformed into the image of our loving and generous God, twice (in Romans 12:3 and Philippians 2:3) instructs us to think of others as more important than ourselves. He knew that generosity towards others is the most effective antidote for the deadly disease of selfishness.

Yet, under this mountain of worldly and materialistic deception, like a smoldering coal buried under the ash of a dying fire, within every one of us still remains a glowing ember that knows the most abundant, most fulfilled life is found not in what we have, but in what we give.

And if we will clear away the ashes of our "burned up" lives and give this ember of generosity some fresh air and new fuel, it will spark a blazing fire within us that will provide both light and warmth, transforming us into what God has created us to be.



We have all experienced even in our smallest, selfless acts of kindness to others (“*even a cup of cold water in my name...*” [Matthew 10:42]) a heightened sense of aliveness, well-being and purpose when we bless the life of another in a meaningful way. Even in the simplest act of giving we find ourselves, albeit often briefly, connected to the heart of a generous God and in harmony with His divine nature. It is at this moment we are being conformed into the image of God and experiencing the joy of being like Him.

From our vantage point, people with the gift of generosity just seem to effortlessly “get it” and “do it.” But for those of us who are not naturally gifted to be generous, we are still called to the same end – an extravagant life of generosity. Without a doubt our path to a generous life will be much more challenging, fraught with many more obstacles, cluttered with many additional opportunities to “backslide.” It may also demand of us much greater spiritual, emotional and physical exercise to successfully ascend the same heights of generosity as those who have the gift. Nonetheless, it is the road we are all called to travel.

Most of us lack the *gift* of generosity, but all of us possess the *nature* of generosity. And it is this God-like nature of generosity that we must diligently cultivate and develop. And in so doing, the world will see the image of our generous Creator living and giving in us; and we will, like the gifted, find “*life indeed*” (I Timothy 6:19 NASB).

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?

2. Do you feel like you are a naturally gifted generous giver? If not, how do you struggle in this area of giving?

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3. What are the things in your life that tend to smother your God-given nature of generosity?

4. How does our fallen, selfish nature prevent us from being as naturally generous as God created us to be? What can we do to make others more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3)?

5. Share about someone you know who seems to have the natural gift of generosity? What does that look like being lived out in their life?

6. What is your reaction to this statement, "Yet, under this mountain of worldly and materialistic deception, like a smoldering coal buried under the ash of a dying fire, within every one of us, still remains a glowing ember that knows the most abundant, most fulfilled life is found not in what we have, but in what we give."



7. When you do give, how does it make you feel? Share the most personally fulfilling gift you have ever made?

8. What situations and what types of people most motivate you to be more generous?

9. What is your response to this assertion: "Most of us lack the gift of generosity, but all of us possess the nature of generosity." What does this say to those of us without the "gift"?

10. What can you do to cultivate your divinely generous nature in order to make you a more generous person?

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

LESSON ONE

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Prayer Request(s)	Answers to Prayer

OBEDIENT COURIER

GENEROUS GIVER OR OBEDIENT COURIER?



Have you ever heard the term *generous giving* used before to describe someone who is giving a lot away? Both the words *generous* and *giving* are used in Scripture, albeit not in the same place very often. In Psalm 37:21 David says, “*The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.*” James 1:5 tells us that God “*gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*”

However, as you continue to seek to personally embrace and consistently apply the concept of biblical stewardship in your own thinking and life, the use of the term *generous giving* should begin creating some uneasiness in you. Here’s why:

If someone labels a man a *generous giver*, it seems to imply two things about that man: (1) what he gives is *his* to give and (2) *he* decides how much to give (making him *generous*). Within the context of biblical stewardship, however, both of these implications would be at the least misleading, if not patently incorrect.

This point can be made by asking a question: “Is it appropriate to describe a person as a *generous giver* if what he is giving is not his to give in the first place?” Let me frame the question to be even more personal: “Would you describe a man as a *generous giver* if what he was giving away was, unknown to you, coming out of *your* personal checking account and not his own?” I suspect you might have a few descriptive terms for him, but *generous giver* would not be one of them.

Consider this hypothetical scenario. Imagine a very rich man decides to give his nephew \$1,000,000 in cash. He calls his nephew and informs him that he is mailing him a certified letter with a cashier’s check in it for \$1,000,000 and that the check will be arriving tomorrow. The next day the doorbell rings and there before the nephew stands the postman. The nephew can barely contain himself as the postman asks him to sign for the letter. The postman then hands the young man the envelope. The young man burst forward grabbing the postman in an enthusiastic embrace, gushing with thanks at how generous he is and how much the nephew appreciates his kindness for giving him such a generous gift. He repeats over and over again, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, you are just so generous!”

What is wrong with this picture? It is true the postman *did* indeed give the nephew a cashier’s check for \$1,000,000. What is wrong is that the postman is getting all the acknowledgment and appreciation for making a gift that he merely delivered for someone else. He was in reality nothing more than the individual charged with the responsibility of delivering the gift to the proper person. I suspect the postman would have likely been quite surprised by the nephew’s overflowing gratitude for simply making a normal delivery as part of his routine duties.

Do you see the point? If we are merely stewards (managers) of our Master’s property and not the owners, then nothing is ours to give away in any amount. And if our Master,

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the Owner, instructs us to deliver someone a gift from His abundance of which we are caretakers, then we are really being nothing more than obedient stewards commissioned to make the delivery to the designated recipient as instructed by the Owner.

Many decades ago there was a television show called, "The Millionaire." In the series a multi-billionaire named John Beresford Tipton, Jr. would randomly give one million dollars, tax free, to people that were complete strangers to him. How Tipton delivered his cashier's checks was through his executive secretary, Michael Anthony. In each episode Anthony would deliver Tipton's check to a different individual. The rest of the show followed what happened to the recipient because of the gift. (It was almost always a bad outcome.) As he delivered the check, Anthony would make it quite clear that the gift was not coming from him, but from someone else who insisted on remaining anonymous. He was simply delivering the gift from this unknown benefactor.

This is the way it should be with us and our giving. We have been entrusted with assets for the purpose of delivering them to the intended recipient as per the directive of the Benefactor. If you were to watch "The Millionaire," you would never think of Anthony as being personally generous simply because he was the one delivering the checks. You would only think of him as doing his job (a fun job no doubt).

Jesus describes this very idea in Luke 17:7-10 (NASB) when he says: *"Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"*

No matter how much we ultimately deliver of God's resources to the intended recipients, would the description of *generous giver* ever be appropriately applied to us because, *"we have done only that which we ought to have done"*? Maybe instead of applying the term *generous giver*, it would be more appropriate to use the term *obedient courier*. This label more accurately describes the proper stewardship mindset we should have in delivering generous gifts from the one and only *Generous Giver*.

In His Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 5:16), Jesus expresses this very idea when He says, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works (the delivery of the generous gifts) and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (the Provider of the generous gifts)."*

As we all seek to be good and faithful stewards, carefully and responsibly carrying out the delivery assignments of the Generous Giver, may we never lose sight of the fact that at most *"We are unworthy slaves;...having done only that which we ought to have done."*

As we complete the remaining days on the path of The Steward's Way, may each of us come to fully appreciate and joyfully embrace the sacred honor of humbly serving our Generous Benefactor as His *obedient courier*.



LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?

2. How does understanding that God is the Owner of everything you possess change the way you think about your giving?

3. How does understanding this “giver” versus “courier” concept change your thinking about giving?

4. Why does the story about the postman and the nephew seem so absurd?

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5. Share how the following statement challenges your idea of being generous:

"If someone labels a man a generous giver, it seems to imply two things about that man: (1) what he gives is his to give and (2) he decides how much to give [making him generous]."

6. How did the story of the old TV show, "The Millionaire", give you a different perspective on giving?

7. How can using the term "obedient courier" help you keep a more healthy perspective on your giving?

8. How can Luke 17:10, "We are unworthy slaves . . . having done only that which we ought to have done" help keep you humble about your giving?



9. Read Matthew 5:16. When you obediently deliver a gift from the Owner (the real Generous Giver), what do you do to ensure all the praise and gratitude for the gift go to the Owner and not to you as merely the obedient courier?

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

LESSON TWO

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Prayer Request(s)	Answers to Prayer

GENEROUS LIVING

GIVING GENEROUSLY OR LIVING GENEROUSLY?



We can glean so much valuable wisdom about giving from our fellow stewards who are, like us, trying to figure out how to be good and faithful in the way they deploy what God has entrusted to them.

One Sunday morning at a large church, the worship minister announced that they were about to watch an extraordinary video about a couple in their church. As the video rolls, a man, who considered himself to be very generous, was surprised – he knew the husband, B.J., because he had played basketball with him at church for the past few years. B.J. was a young man in his late twenties, had a successful business and was an extremely talented athlete. Since he knew B.J., he proudly nudged his wife and said, “I know him!”

His excitement, however, quickly turned to embarrassment as B.J. and his wife shared their story. B.J.’s wife had a high school friend who was in need of a kidney transplant. Both B.J. and his wife immediately said to each other, “Maybe we could give her one of our kidneys.” It seemed reasonable to this man that B.J.’s wife might want to give her good friend one of her kidneys; but as it turned out, B.J.’s kidney was the perfect match. So, without hesitation B.J. donated one of his kidneys to his wife’s high school friend. They shared that it just seemed like the right thing to do. B.J. had an extra kidney and this girl had none.

The man sat stunned. He silently told himself, “I would never give one of my kidneys to one of my wife’s friends. I wouldn’t even consider it. Sure, I would give one to my wife or one of my children if they needed it, but to one of my wife’s friends?”

He said as he was relating this story, “I am all about giving of my time, talent and treasure, but giving my *torso* – my body parts? That was a level of giving that entirely surpassed my current concept of generosity.”

Just a few days later, this same man was preparing to board a plane to return home from a business trip. He was first in line to board and was looking forward to getting comfortable in his first class seat and then “zoning out” on the flight home.

Just prior to boarding, a very heavy, crippled man had been escorted down the jetway in his wheelchair to board the plane. A few minutes later just as the announcement for first class boarding started, some guy cut right in front of the man and handed the attendant his boarding pass. His rude manner and obviously arrogant attitude really irritated the man.

As they got to the bottom of the jetway, four airline staff were having difficulty getting the heavy, crippled man out of his wheelchair and into the airline wheelchair needed to get him on the plane. No one was able to board because they were right in front of the plane door. The businessman shared, “I stood there stewing over this rude “line cutter” right in front of me and impatiently watching as the airline employees struggled to get

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this crippled man into the airline wheelchair.”

Then, “The bomb fell,” he shared.

The guy who cut in front of him called out to the flight crew, “Hey, let me help you.” So, he drops his bags and hurries over to help them get the man into the wheelchair.

The businessman confessed, “I felt so ashamed. I was standing there just like the line cutter, but the thought never even crossed my mind to offer any help. Of all the people standing there watching this happen, the guy who I was convinced was so selfish and full of himself was the one who volunteered to help.”

Unfortunately, this businessman’s humiliation wasn’t over yet. Once the flight crew finally got the man in the wheelchair and through the plane door, Mr. Helpful then says to the airline staff, “Let me go back out and get his bag for you.” Coming back off the plane, he grabs the bag of the man he just helped, which, by the way, was sitting right at the feet of the businessman, and takes it back onto the plane to the crippled man. The businessman missed yet another opportunity to live generously.

By this point he was feeling very convicted about his lack of generosity. Interestingly, it turned out the line-cutter was sitting right across the aisle from him. The businessman told him that he appreciated his willingness to help the crippled man. The man smiled and said, “It wasn’t anything.” To him it might not have been anything, but the businessman shared, “It proved that of the two of us I was the one who was really selfish and full of myself, not the line cutter.”

But God still wasn’t finished rocking this businessman’s generosity world. As he was finally relaxing in his first class aisle seat, the passengers in economy begin filing past. He heard a woman immediately behind him ask a soldier who was standing right by the him, “Soldier, what seat are you in?” He says, “21B.” “One of the dreaded middle seats in the back,” the businessman thought.

She then said to him, “Soldier, would you like to sit here?” The soldier hesitated, but the woman insisted that he take her first class seat and she would go back and sit in his middle economy seat.

The businessman was humbled again! This conversation was all happening right next to him. He admitted, “Know that I deeply appreciate what our military does for us as a country and for me as one of its citizens. I have even thanked soldiers for their service on many occasions. But the thought of offering this soldier my first class seat and taking a middle seat in economy on a packed plane was another indicator of just how limited my generosity really was.”

These small, but powerful stories taught this man and can also teach us a very important lesson. The lesson is this: *We can be generous in how we give without being generous in how we live. Conversely, a person who lives generously always gives generously.*

In other words, we may be willing to be extremely generous in giving what we want to give when and where we want to give it, but with what we don’t want to give, we



actually can find ourselves being just as selfish and tight-fisted as the infamous Ebenezer Scrooge. *Living* generously, not *giving* generously needs to be our life goal.

We should note three common characteristics of people who model generous living:

Characteristic #1

GENEROUS LIVING IS OPEN-HEARTED

Those who live generously are open-hearted and alert to find people who are struggling, hurting or in pain. They empathize with those whose world is difficult, and they enjoy trying to make it better.

Characteristic #2

GENEROUS LIVING IS OPEN-MINDED

The minds of those who live generously are always thinking about creative ways to bless and encourage others in both great and small ways. They are consciously engaged in their world and the lives of those around them, poised to show generosity to anyone whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Characteristic #3

GENEROUS LIVING IS OPEN-HANDED

The resources of those who live generously, *all of them* (time, talent, treasure and torso), are ready to be gladly given whenever a need or an opportunity is discovered. When it is within their power to respond, they relish the privilege to make a difference and bless the life of another – friend or stranger. They live out the extreme attitude, “*What is mine is yours and you can have it.*”

The stories of this man vividly demonstrate to all of us that the key to living a generous life is easy to understand. It is, however, excruciatingly difficult to live because of what it requires of us – a radical change in our self-assessment. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:3, “*...but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.*” There it is – in just one part of one verse – “*regard one another as more important than himself.*”

If we can wholly embrace this radical change in our self-assessment, and truly come to believe that others are more important than ourselves, we will be completely transformed into not just people who are *giving* generously but, more importantly, into people who are *living* generously – who reflect an open-hearted, open-minded and open-handed life. If we really want to achieve maximum Kingdom impact in our lives, we need to expand our focus to not just *giving* generously, but more importantly to *living* generously.

LESSON THREE

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?

2. Which of the three stories shared were you able to most relate to and why?

3. Why is it so much more difficult for people to live generously than it is to give generously?

4. Three characteristics were given of a person who lives generously:

- a. Open-Hearted
- b. Open-Minded
- c. Open-Handed

a) Which of these is the easiest for you to successfully live out and why?

b) Which of these is the most difficult for you to successfully live out and why?

5. Share a personal experience of when you did successfully live generously?

6. Share a time in which you later realized that you had walked right past an opportunity to be generous to someone, but because you were so distracted at the time with your own agenda, you missed the opportunity completely?

7. Respond to the quote, "I can be generous in how I give without being generous in how I live." How can we become more conscious about living generously so we can more effectively present a Christ-like example for the world to see?

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8. Read Philippians 2:3. Why is it important to keep this in the forefront of our minds in order to improve our efforts to become more overtly generous in how we live our daily lives?

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

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Prayer Request(s)	Answers to Prayer

LESSON FOUR

KNOWN OR SECRET GIVING

LETTING YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND IS DOING



One of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount when He discusses giving. Here is what He actually says:

Matthew 6:1-4, *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised*

by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

What Jesus is teaching here has led many believers to conclude that unless your giving is entirely anonymous, you will receive no reward from the Lord for your gifts. A man was once heard acknowledging to an audience that by sharing his giving story he would now be losing his reward.

Is this what Jesus is teaching? Not at all. In fact, we will have missed Jesus' point entirely if that is what we conclude. It is good to remember that chapters 5-7 are one sermon. We must not ignore the rest of what Jesus says. Context, here, is key. There are three very important lessons about giving that we can draw from Jesus' sermon.

FIRST, HE TEACHES US TO GIVE

We must not overlook the obvious. Jesus tells us *"when you give"* – He does not say *if* you give. Giving is an expected and commanded part of being a follower of Jesus. His teaching here begins with the assumption that every follower of Jesus will be giving. He then addresses the dangers and pitfalls we must avoid when we do our giving. The Bible gives us four flashing "caution lights" that should warn us that we might indeed have gotten into an illicit love affair with the world and the things of this world.

Sadly, many immature and "non-giving" believers use this passage as a way to *not* give and keep their non-giving a secret. If ever asked about their giving, they hide behind this passage justifying that their giving is to be kept a secret.

SECOND, HE TEACHES US TO GIVE PURELY

The point Jesus is really trying to make here is about our giving motives. He says that we should never do our giving, *"in order to be seen by them"* and subsequently to be *"praised by others."* In other words, we do not want to give *because* of what we might get from it – like others having elevated thoughts of us or making complimentary comments about

us, or our receiving some special treatment because of our giving. Jesus is saying that if your motive for giving is to draw attention to yourself, you are trading an eternal reward for a temporal one. It is not as important whether or not others know about your giving; it is important however, to know the motives behind why your giving was made known to others.

If you study Jesus' entire sermon, you will see the progression of His message. In the last half of chapter five (verses 21-48), He emphasizes inner moral righteousness, providing us six specific illustrations of murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love. In the first eighteen verses of the sixth chapter He emphasizes outward formal righteousness and gives us three representative illustrations of typical religious activities: giving, praying and fasting. These three activities are all connected in the flow of His message.

Notice, Jesus also teaches us to go into our *closet* (Matthew 6:6, KJV) to pray and not to do it publically. Isn't it interesting that we stringently believe our giving ought to be the ultimate private act, yet we do not apply the "secrecy doctrine" to prayer even though Jesus' teaching on both of these practices are almost identical? He even adds one additional common religious practice of that day when He tells us that your *"fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you"* (Matthew 6:18).

Do you see the repetitiveness in each of these three illustrations? Do something with pure motives and do not seek to be seen and admired by others. Then God, who knows the true motives of your heart, will reward you for your giving, praying and fasting. Why do we put giving in a different category from the other two practices? We say *giving* needs to be private, yet we don't hesitate to ask people to audibly pray and be heard by others?

Additionally, if giving was meant to be a secret, why are we told about the many believers who gave in Acts 2:45 and also Barnabas and others who gave, recorded in Acts 4:32-37? All this was public knowledge and even recorded by Luke for all future believers to know. You see, it is not about *secrecy*, it is about *motive*. We should be motivated to give as an act of personal worship and not so we might be praised and honored by others for what we have given. If that is the motive, then that person has *"received [his] reward."*

THIRD, HE TEACHES US TO GIVE PURELY TO GLORIFY GOD AND MOTIVATE OTHERS

Jesus' sermon also teaches us what the proper motivation for our giving and good works should be. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus says, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

If we keep our giving and good works under a bushel (Matthew 5:15) or keep them a secret, thinking this is what Jesus wants, how can we obey this part of His sermon? We are told here to let our light (our giving/our good works) *"shine before others so they may see your good works."* Taken at face value it seems that Jesus is contradicting Himself.

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We must understand that Jesus is addressing the giver's motive (i.e. to *"give glory to your Father who is in heaven"*) and not who knows about the good gift.

If in our giving and doing good we always seek to deflect the praise and glory for giving from ourselves (Matthew 6:1-4) to God (Matthew 5:16), acknowledging that, *"every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights..."* (James 1:17), we are being obedient to both passages. If we readily seek to deflect the praise from our known giving to the Father, then we will always be safe from others ever thinking more highly of us than they should (Romans 12:3).

There is a second healthy motivation for actually making your giving known. Hebrews 10:24 tells us, *"let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds...."* There is no more compelling reason to make our giving known to others than in so doing to challenge other believers to step up their level of generosity and experience the joy and the blessing that comes from increased, obedient giving.

Just think how much poorer we would all be if the likes of J. C. Penny and R. G. Letourneau, who both gave away 90% of their massive incomes during their lifetimes, would have never let us know what they were doing. Or, what about Stanley Tam (who wrote the book, *God Owns My Business*) and Alan Barnhart, who both have given their entire companies away to the Lord, choosing to live on modest salaries and annually funneling millions of dollars of company profits to Kingdom causes worldwide? What about all the Bible characters, who fill the pages of Scripture, who inspire and challenge us to greater levels of sacrificial giving? What if they would have all kept it a secret? What a loss for us!

Jesus' message about giving is both clear and simple: (1) Give; (2) Give purely; and (3) Give purely to glorify God and motivate others. Rather than concern yourself with who will know about your giving, instead focus on who will be glorified by your giving and who you might inspire to join you in your giving adventures. So, if your motives are pure, go ahead and *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 5:16). The more who are blessed and inspired by your giving, the better!

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?



2. What have you been taught about anonymous giving in the past?

3. What are some situations where anonymous giving might be appropriate?

4. What are some healthy reasons for making your giving known?

5. What are some poor motives for anonymous giving?

6. In what ways can known giving bring honor to God and even encourage and motivate others to give more also?

LESSON FOUR

7. Discuss a person you know who gives openly. How has knowing about how and what they are giving motivated you to be a more obedient courier?

8. How can we better check our motives so we can give the way God intended?

9. What guards can you set up to make sure your “public” giving is done properly, bringing glory and honor to God and not you?

10. Share a story of when you gave to help another and they knew about it. How did you handle their response of gratefulness to you?

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

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Prayer Request(s)	Answers to Prayer

LESSON FIVE

EXAMINING YOUR TIMELINE

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU GIVE AWAY IF..?



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? Those certainly are questions that should cause all of us to pause and reflect.

If our answer to the last question is different from 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 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, 12 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 a 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. Gold, which is universally valued here on earth, God uses for street pavement in heaven. 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 really 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 to adopt a shorter timeline rather than a longer one.

LESSON FIVE

LIFE APPLICATION 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?

LESSON FIVE

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Prayer Request(s)	Answers to Prayer

NOT JUST ABOUT MONEY

THE GREATEST GIFT YOU HAVE TO GIVE



Have you ever wondered why a poor, old woman living in the slums of Calcutta, India, who devoted her life to the mundane task of caring for unwanted, starving children, was internationally known and revered and even awarded the distinguished Nobel Peace Prize? What did she do to deserve such impressive notoriety? Who was this woman? You and the rest of the world knew her. She was Mother Teresa.

By our materialistic, western standards, Mother Teresa was a miserable failure. She never owned her own home. She had no money set aside for retirement, had not built a successful business or had much of an income. She did not own a car and wore the same style of clothes every day.

There was no reason why this fragile woman living in the inner city of an obscure, economically struggling country, working with hundreds of seemingly insignificant children should have earned such worldwide respect and prestigious accolades.

The fact is that as a country, specifically, and as a world, generally, we have drifted quite far from our original moral, ethical, and religious moorings. However, we have not drifted so far from them that we do not still deeply respect people who are willing to sacrificially give of themselves to help the helpless. Deep down, each of us knows that in so doing we will experience the highest level of personal fulfillment and spiritual joy even though this reality is seldom part of our daily consciousness. Sadly, we often find ourselves so busy in our headlong pursuit of living life that we actually end up missing the true essence of life.

It is not enough to simply read the biographies of great men and women who throughout history have happily traded a life of prosperity, luxury, and comfort for one of toil, sacrifice, disease, and even death to help those who cannot help themselves. You may be inspired by their great religious and humanitarian efforts, but you will never experience their tremendous blessing. They would all acknowledge that the fulfillment they found surpassed everything they voluntarily gave up in the trade.

The following story is just a simple illustration of this truth:

A group of twelve youth and adults traveled to Juarez, Mexico to build a home for a needy family. The husband of the family, for whom the group was to build the home, worked sixty hours each week to earn \$30. Their current home was a tiny, one-room shanty constructed out of shipping skids and wrapped in tar paper. Their three-year-old daughter was an invalid and had major respiratory problems. She could only go outside for a few minutes at a time.

The campsite where this group pitched their tents was an old cow pasture located across the road from a pigpen. The restrooms were pit toilets, where it seemed half the flies in all of Mexico resided. If the flies didn't drive you out, the smell would. The other half of the flies in Mexico swarmed all over the food they tried to eat. They slept on the ground,

LESSON SIX

and from about 2 a.m. on they were serenaded by a chorus of roosters making a sound night's sleep impossible. They cleaned up each day by pouring buckets of water over their heads. It was a challenging week for this group in many ways.

Yet, in spite of all of this, the group seized the challenge of building a humble dwelling for this needy family with the unity and zeal you might expect only from those who were building a grand palace for a king.

On the second day, as the team enthusiastically raised the walls to the new home, the mother stood by crying. All who saw her wept too. At that moment the group was reminded that they were not just building a house, they were helping people.

Seeing that woman's tears of joy made enduring all the discomfort of the trip wholly inconsequential. The group had again come to appreciate the words of Jesus, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35b). In this very small act of kindness, they had been reminded of this enduring truth.

What is interesting is that this group came home richer than they were before the trip. Some left their wives and children to go. Some took a week off work. They all spent money to go, and they all endured physical discomfort. Yet, they came home richer. How? The answer cannot be explained in physical terms because it transcends the realm of the physical. It can only be explained in spiritual terms. And the explanation is this: *You will always make a profit when you give yourself away to others.*

Let me suggest that the personal delight of giving massive sums of money away is decidedly minuscule in comparison to the joy you will realize by giving *yourself* away to a worthy cause.

The story of the rich, young ruler expresses this reality perfectly. Here is the story:

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich (Luke 18:18-23).

You see, Jesus was not interested in this young man's wealth. In fact, Jesus told him to give it all away to the poor. What Jesus really wanted was the young man himself. And what Jesus wants most from you – is you!

So, what is the greatest charitable gift you have to give? *Yourself!* Why not commit to make a gift of yourself to our King and to some worthy Kingdom cause that you can spend yourself on? You will, without a doubt, be all the richer for it.



LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?

2. Share a recent incident when you personally gave of yourself for the good of others.

3. Discuss your reaction to this statement: *Deep down, each of us knows that in so doing (giving of ourselves) we will experience the highest level of personal fulfillment and spiritual joy, even though it is seldom part of our daily consciousness.*

4. What would have to change in your life to enable you to give more of yourself to others on a regular basis?

5. Describe a recent mission trip or community project and how it changed your attitude and life?

LESSON SIX

6. Discuss the differences between giving money and giving yourself? Which one has the greatest impact on you?

7. If your life continues as it is now, what will people remember you for after you eternally relocate?

8. As believers, what do you think are our greatest barriers in giving of ourselves?

9. How do you react to the statement: *The personal delight of giving massive sums of money away is decidedly minuscule in comparison to the joy you will realize by giving yourself away to a worthy cause.*

10. Have you ever personally known someone who lived this out? What impacted you most about them?

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

LESSON SIX

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Prayer Request(s)	Answers to Prayer



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