

Lesson 4

The Blessings of Generosity and God's Perspective

Lesson Objectives:

Understand the blessings associated with being a generous giver

Look at these blessing through God's perspective

Seek the giver of blessings not the blessing

Begin being a generous giver



SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

Deuteronomy 15:10
Proverbs 11:24-25
Malachi 3:10-12
2 Corinthians 9:6-8
James 4:1-8
Mathew 6:25-34
1Timothy 6:1-11
Proverbs 10:22

Introduction

What is Christian prosperity? Does our western culture influence how we view the blessings of God? Are our views of God's blessings aligned with scripture? We live in a culture where our success is judged by the material blessing one acquires or the amount of money one makes. Cars and homes are overpriced because purchasing power is based on how much we can afford monthly rather than our ability to buy. We work to pay for living beyond our means affecting our ability to be a generous Christian and our ability to serve God and others. Did God intend for his blessings to hold us in bondage or is there more to his blessings than acquiring materialism?

Vision Point/Icebreaker

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- What messages does our culture send about money and finances?
- Do you have any fears in regard to money and finances?
- What are they?

We all have fears when it comes to finances. We struggle between what we need and what we want, and we treat money as if it is eternal, even though we know that we can't take it with us when we die. For those reasons and more, finances create a lot of anxiety in our lives. This fear and anxiety has a tendency to affect how we live and what we deem important. It can even prevent us from experiencing the blessings of being a generous believer. If we ever want to live with a sense of contentment rather than fear, we must learn to trust the God who is an abundant provider.

Blessing of a Generous Giver

Have different people in the group look up and read the following scriptures.

Deuteronomy 15:9-10

Proverbs 11:24-25

Malachi 3:10-12

2 Corinthians 9:6-13

Have the group make a list of the blessing associated with being a generous giver.

- What cause and effect relationship do you see in each of these verses?
- What should be our primary focus be in relation to the blessings that God provides a generous giver?
- Can we trust God that if we are generous we will receive the intended blessing?
- What is the difference between giving to receive and receiving the blessings of being a generous Christian?

God's Blessing in Perspective

Have a volunteer read Mathew 6:25-34

- According to these verses, what are three specific reasons Jesus gives us for not worrying about the basic provisions of life?
- What's required for us to take seriously Jesus' instruction not to worry about the necessities of life?
- What are we telling God when we pray, "Give us..." and yet worry?
- What are some examples of spiritual consequences?

Jesus asked rhetorically, "Isn't life more than food and clothing?" (v. 25). Is the only source for fulfillment what we eat and what we wear? Of course not. Jesus is establishing that worry is illogical for the believer. If God is the Creator of the world, then will He not also provide for our needs? From this passage we are told not to worry because we can trust Creator God with the details (v. 25).

- What additional reasons for not worrying do you take away from verses 28-32?
- What is main problem with worry in the life of a Christian?
- How might worry affect our ability to be a generous giver?

Jesus rebuked the worrier by the harshest indictment He gave to any disciple—"you of little faith." Anxiety can reveal a lack of faith. Faith demands more than mere intellectual assent to a truth. Faith calls for trust in a loving and personal God at work in the world.

- Is it practical to depend on God for vital necessities like food and clothing?
- Why do you think He expects us to?
- Do the examples in verses 24-32 encourage you? If so, in what way?

Picking up the argument begun in verse 25, Jesus exhorted, "So don't worry". Jesus did not condemn the use or need of food or drink or clothing. But He rejected worry about those things.

- How can we make changes that will help us depend on God more consistently and thus reduce stress?
- Practically speaking, what does it mean to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”?
- How have you seen Jesus' statement in verse 33 proven true in your life?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:1-12

- How does Paul's view of contentment compare with the modern world's view of contentment?
- Why does God want His children to be content? What is He trying to teach us?
- What does lack of contentment say about our view of God's provision for us?

The desire to make money and the desire to be happy are two driving forces of modern life. The danger is in believing the first will get you the second—that if you have enough material wealth, you will be content. The falsehood of this assumption is revealed to us every day. The more people have, the more they seem to desire. Paul reminds us, however, that everything we have comes from God and is given to us as something we can offer back to Him. When we are in a relationship with God, we should be content with our most basic needs met, and then remain content in Him even when they may not be met. When we struggle to be content, we communicate to God that He is not enough for us, and we do not trust Him to meet our needs.

Have a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8.

- What words in these verses describe the attitude about giving that God will honor?
- What words describe attitudes God will not honor?
- How does your attitude affect your giving?
- What is the result of giving reluctantly or because someone compelled you to do so?

Believers are to give generously and cheerfully. Giving will be neither generous nor cheerful if givers are anxious about meeting their own needs. Christians may have reasoned that the more they gave, the less they would have and the more likely they would become dependent on the giving of others.

- How did Paul instruct the Corinthians to become more cheerful givers?
- How do you interpret the promise of good return for your giving? Have you experienced this?
- What is God's purpose in providing the giver everything he needs?

Paul was not advocating that we give so we can get rich. On the contrary, when one's giving is an expression of God's grace, God will provide more to the giver, who then will be able to give even more. God sees far more clearly than we do that all worldly wealth is temporary. He expects His people to invest their financial resources in ways that will endure for eternity. Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly but purposefully.

Whether you consider yourself wealthy or not, Just living in America makes us wealthier than most of the world. Of those born in the United States, almost all will be in the world's richest 20%. With that in mind, read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

- What are God's expectations for people who are "rich in this present age," according to this passage?
- Why is generosity an effective way to combat the false pride and false security that money brings?

Pray

As your group begins prayer time, each person should reflect on our attitude toward the blessings of God.

Ask God to help you to distinguish between your needs and wants.

Ask God to learn to seek him first and trust him for provision and his blessing.

Ask God for help you change your attitude toward material desires in order to allow you to become a generous giver.

As we close this series, ask God to show you changes that you need to take in order to be obedient to his word in giving. Ask him where to begin to give in order to obey his word in being a generous giver.

Commentary

MATTHEW 6:25-34

6:25. Jesus' point could be translated as "stop worrying." The questions in 6:25b imply, "If God is the provider of life and body, He will also provide for their sustenance."

6:26. In this verse Jesus came to the first of two illustrations, supporting His main theme in verse 25. Note the use again of the phrase heavenly Father, especially in this context of God's loving care. Jesus was not advocating waiting lazily for God's provision, but avoiding anxiety as we take responsibility for obtaining it.

6:27. This verse moves away from the specific example of food to the broader picture of anxiety in general, showing its utter futility. Jesus was saying, "If you try to take your basic provision into your own hands, you will find you do not have the power over life and death. Only God has this power, and He will sustain you as long as His plan intends."

6:28-30. Here we are given a more fully developed picture of the second illustration supporting Jesus' main point in verse 25. Verse 30 is a conditional statement, assuming the truth of the condition. So it could just as easily be translated, "Since that is how God clothes the grass of the field." The qualifying phrase, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, emphasizes the transience and worthlessness of the grass. If God cares so much for something of little value, He will certainly care even more for us who are of much greater value to Him. This passage is not only an exhortation to trust the Father, but it is also an affirmation of our great worth in His eyes.

The words you of little faith in 6:30 should be translated literally "little faith ones" (and is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28). While it can be a confrontational term, it may also be endearing. In this context, Jesus' tone was not scolding, but coaxing and reasoning. He was asking, "Do you trust your Father or not?"—not with a slap in our face, but with an arm around our shoulder. Jesus was not belittling His disciples; He was encouraging them upward.

6:31-33. With these three verses, having illustrated and supported His theme, Jesus built His case. In verse 32, He made two more points about anxiety. First, it was downright pagan; anxiety was the attitude of those who were not a part of God's kingdom. Second, it was totally unnecessary to worry about what to eat or drink or wear, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Three times in verses 32 and 33, we find the phrase all these things. We might imagine Jesus using it somewhat disparagingly. This was not to belittle the importance of basic necessities, but to place them at the back of the mind of His disciples, far behind His kingdom and righteousness in importance. "All these things" are what pagans (and the Pharisees) scrambled after. "All these things" are thoroughly known by the Father.

“All these things” will fall into place when we put God’s kingdom and righteousness in its proper place and serve the kingdom’s interests.

6:34. Jesus restated for the third time His command, Do not worry. This time He broadened it to include any possible anxieties we may have for tomorrow. As an expression of trust in his heavenly Father, the kingdom servant is to live in the present, trusting the Father for the grace to cover the needs of the present. “When tomorrow comes, the Father will provide the grace to cover its needs also,” is the implied assurance.

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19

Paul expanded his brief reference to materialism among the false teachers (v. 5) into a pointed review of the dangers of greed. Addressing his words specifically to those who willed to become rich, he affirmed that godliness and not wealth brings great gain (v. 6). He explained two reasons for which contentment should be a companion of godliness (vv. 7-8). In vv. 9-10 he presented the desire for wealth as a trap that plunges the unwary into spiritual ruin.

6:6. Paul commended the benefits of godliness with contentment in v. 6 (see Ps 37:3-5). Paul used the word “contentment” to refer to an attitude of mind independent of externals and dependent only on God. He was not advocating godless self-sufficiency as a source of contentment. Paul believed that true sufficiency is Christ-sufficiency (Phil 4:13). Paul was affirming that those who felt that godliness leads to gain were indeed correct, for there is great profit (spiritual profit) in a brand of godliness that possesses a contentment in the realm of its material possessions. True godliness is a means of much gain, for it promises benefits for this life and the next (4:8). Adding contentment to this godliness would promote gratitude for God’s gracious gifts in this life (see 1 Tim 4:4-5).

6:7-8. Why do godliness and contentment represent great gain? Paul’s “for” clause introduced an eschatological reason for this contentment. Since after a brief stay we shall depart this life as we came in, it is sheer folly to concern ourselves with earthly matters. Material gain is irrelevant, and greed is irrational (see Job 1:21). The second reason (v. 8) is that we must be content when we possess life’s necessities. The term “clothing” is general enough to include both clothing and shelter, but the immediate context favors limiting it to personal possessions such as dress. Paul’s words reflect the teaching of Jesus (Matt 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31). Paul referred to food and clothing as symbols of life’s necessities. What is actually a necessity will vary somewhat in different societies. However, all of us face the temptation of greedily coveting more than we need.

In these verses Paul warned that godliness is not a trait from which to make material profit (v. 5). True godliness has contentment for its companion (v. 6). Since we cannot take life's luxuries into God's presence, we should be content with life's necessities (vv. 7-8). Greed can find no place in an attitude like this.

6:9-10. Paul spoke the words of vv. 9-10 to those who "want to get rich" ("men who keep planning to get rich," Williams). There is no condemnation of wealth as such, and the words do not apply to someone who wistfully longs, "It would be nice to have more money." In v. 9 Paul painted three progressive pitfalls in which the willful wealth-seeker becomes entangled. The "desires" are "foolish" because instead of bringing gain, they only produce harm. Paul supported this warning about wealth with a contemporary proverb. We can make three comments about the proverb. First, it does not condemn money but the love of money. Second, it does not state that all evil comes from the love of money, but such misplaced love can cause a great variety of ("all kinds of") evil. It is incorrect to say that the love of money causes all sins. Ambition and sexual lust are also fertile breeding grounds of sin. Third, the wandering elders from Ephesus who had sold out to greed were living proof of this maxim. The concern about materialism Paul had expressed in v. 5 had become a reality in the false teachers. Judas and Ananias and Sapphira were New Testament figures who "drowned" because of this inordinate love.

There is a link between the "faith" of the gospel and the blessedness God promises to his people (6:10b; Ps 1). The denial of one negates the other. Some translations (e.g., "spiked themselves on many thorny griefs," NEB) capture the intensely painful idea behind the word "pierced." With these graphic words Paul concluded his description of the heretics, their false teaching, and their false practice. He now turned his attention to specific words of guidance for his beloved Timothy.

6:11. The beginning words, "But you," show that Timothy's behavior was to provide an utter contrast to that of the false teachers mentioned in vv. 3-10. The twin commands of v. 11 contain a warning and a challenge. Timothy was warned to flee the heresy, divisiveness, and greed that Paul had denounced in vv. 3-10. He was challenged to "pursue" six virtues mentioned in three pairs. Each trait represents a must to insure Timothy's effectiveness in his ministry. The term "righteousness" refers primarily to upright conduct before human beings, and "godliness" describes an open and obedient relationship before God. The words "faith" and "love" reflect trust in God and benevolence and goodwill toward others (see 2 Thess 1:3; Titus 2:2). Timothy would need "endurance" in order to guarantee staying power for his difficult task. He needed "gentleness" in order to deal effectively with cantankerous heretics and wavering believers.

6:12. Having urged Timothy to avoid the false vagaries of the heretics and to develop needed Christian graces, Paul gave directives for perseverance. First, he borrowed an image from the athletic sphere to urge Timothy to “keep up the good fight for the faith.” The metaphor can imply either running or boxing or wrestling. The use of the present tense for “fight” suggests a continuous struggle. Second, Paul used a command focusing on eschatology urging Timothy to continue in the contest. Depending on the context, Paul could present eternal life as a blessing to be realized at the end (here and in Rom 6:22) or as a present experience (2 Cor 4:10-12, though the expression differs in this passage). The fact that God had “called” Timothy to eternal life suggests that it was already in his grasp but not completely held. Paul’s command was intended to stir up Timothy to renewed vigor, but it does not imply that Timothy earned eternal life by self-effort. It suggests that “eternal life” is more of a goal toward which Timothy was to orient his efforts rather than a prize that God would give him as a reward for that effort. The fact that God had called him was an incentive for his response.

Paul turned from a series of admonitions to Timothy to give advice to those already rich. The preceding words on wealth in vv. 6-10 were spoken to those who aspired to wealth. As a final thought Paul spoke a word to those who already had it. The constructive advice here balances the more extreme prohibitions of the earlier passage. He did not condemn wealth, but he showed the added temptations the wealthy face. He was vitally concerned that Christians have the right attitude toward their wealth and make the proper use of it (cf. Luke 12:13-21; Ps 52:7).

6:17. Paul’s beginning reference to the “present world” suggests that the wealthy can have their wealth only in this age. It is good for this present world, but it does not convert automatically into blessedness in the world beyond. In this verse Paul contrasted right and wrong responses to the possession of wealth. A wrong response involves an arrogant attitude and the making of wealth as the “hope” of one’s life. As a deterrent to trusting in riches, Paul mentioned the transitory, uncertain nature of wealth. The word “uncertain” contains a reminder that it is by no means clear that riches will continue with the one who has them. The right response is to hope in a God who lavishes on his people all their needs. The statement implies that God does not give wealth to promote pride but that we might use and enjoy it in his will (cf. Jas 2:5; 4:13-14; 5:2-3). Paul’s sound advice walks the straight line between a world-denying asceticism and a self-centered indulgence. The advice promotes gratitude toward God for the benefits he bestows.

6:18. Paul mentioned four ways to use wealth wisely. “To do good” involves using wealth in a positive way instead of letting it feed a life of personal luxury. “To be rich in

good deeds" pointed the wealthy in the direction in which they were to be truly rich, in the doing of good deeds. These two verbs probably include more than benevolence. The need for benevolence is emphasized in the next pair of terms. "To be generous" demands a liberal sharing of wealth with others. One who is "willing to share" shows that the generous act of giving is to spring from internal generosity. Paul was suggesting that genuine wealth is found in what we give, not what we have.

6:19. Paul outlined the outcome of such generosity by stressing two truths. First, he stressed that giving generously to the needy stores for the giver a future treasure. Paul was not advocating that the giver could earn salvation or favors from God. Good works are solid evidence of salvation and assure us that we have eternal life. Paul may have based these thoughts on such words as contained in Matt 6:19-21. The godless, on the other hand, lay up treasures for themselves of a different kind (Jas 5:1-5). Second, Paul stressed that generous actions allow the giver to lay hold of eternal life in the here and now. Paul had urged Timothy to lay hold of this in v. 12. Here Paul expressed that taking hold of eternal life is a goal of the unselfish giving he had commanded. Christians who enter the life of love by unselfish behavior will enter gloriously into God's presence in the life to come.