

GROWTHguide

FOR THE WEEK OF NOV. 22, 2015

"Riches Beyond Measure"



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 25:14-30, Psalm 50:10-12 and Luke 18:18-30

REFLECTION AND STUDY

MONDAY

Have you ever noticed what happens to lottery winners or people who inherit money? You'd think winning or inheriting a large sum of money would change their lives for the better, but that's not always the case. Often past lottery winners make headlines for the second time when they go broke, pick up dangerous—or even illegal—habits, find themselves involved in lawsuits, or discover that they've lost total trust in everyone around them because everyone seems to want a handout. Money can be a tricky thing, whether there's a lot of it or a little of it. It's easy to think that it can solve all of the world's problems, but it can't. We don't know how God decides who gets what, but we do know that God sees the end from the beginning. He knows what we can handle and what we can't. Take a moment and read the scripture from Matthew. Why do you think the three servants were all entrusted with different amounts? Had they already proven their level of trustworthiness or ability? Did the master know that one of them would be foolish with his sum? Did he know the other two would be wise? Consider these questions:

- Does this story reveal something about my own financial state?
- Am I doing well with the small things so God can give me greater things?
- Does the way I handle money motivate God to give me more?

Pray over the questions and seek your heart for the truth. If there is something you need to give to God, ask Him to show you what that is.

TUESDAY

Think about where you'd be without money in your life. How would you pay for your house? How would you put gas in your car, keep the lights turned on, and the refrigerator stocked? It's the same way in God's house, too. The staff needs to be paid, the church bus gas tank must be filled, the lights kept on, and some money set aside to help those in distress. So where does the money come from? Psalm 50:10 tells us that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but he doesn't write a check every week to make sure things are taken care of. Just as with everything else we've discussed, God wants to partner with us to do it. He wants us to do it, "TOGETHER!" Yes, God can do miracles with finances. He can give our church leaders wisdom on where to invest and how to stretch a dollar. He wants to use us, however, to finance his work. It really points out a very tough question, but one every disciple of Jesus Christ must ask each day:

- Am I cheating God, or do I acknowledge how much he's given me by how much I give back?

Pray that God would create miracles from the gifts you give to His church.

WEDNESDAY

Like the rich young man in Luke 18, money and our attitude toward it reveal a lot about our faith in God. The young man had already jumped through a dozen hoops in his effort to attain eternal life, but giving away everything he had was his line in the sand. He wouldn't do that even if it meant giving up eternal life. He wanted eternal life enough to do good things, but he didn't want it enough to give up some of the comforts of his earthly life. We can be the same way. Some of us may be afraid that if we give, we won't have enough to cover the electric bill or make the house payment. Some of us write the church a check out of what's left when we've paid every other bill. When we give in this way there will be many times when there's nothing left for God. When we put God last, His plan of salvation for the community and world—through the work of the local church—can't happen. When we put God's work last, we tend to get angry at our church because the resources to do Kingdom work are short and yet the Kingdom vision is large. Many good people become disappointed and angry at their church, or even their pastor, when this happens. But the source of the problem really resides with the giver.

- Do you draw a line in the sand when it comes to giving God your finances?

Pray that God would help you remember to put Him first and further His ministry through the church.

THURSDAY

When we hold on tightly to what we have out of fear, we rob God of the room to do His work. Remember what God says in Malachi 3:10, *"Test me in this!"* If we give God his portion first, do we have a chance to see a miracle in all the bills getting paid anyway? If we give sacrificially, do we give God a chance to blow us away with His blessing? How much do you trust in God's ability to take care of you?

- Do I focus more on my own fears about not having enough, or on God's ability to take care of me?

Pray and ask God to help you trust him more fully.

FRIDAY

In the world, we can mess up the concept of giving gifts. Instead of giving a gift out of simple love for the person on the receiving end, we give gifts out of obligation, or because we think the recipient might have something for us in return. Each Christmas season, analysts predict how much money each family will spend on holiday gifts. A recent study showed that the average pet owner will spend one hundred dollars on Christmas gifts for his or her pets. It's sad to say, but of all the gifts we give, the ones we give our pets may just be the most unconditional. We expect nothing from them in return. Think about the gifts you give to God, and answer the questions below:

- Do I give because I think I will get something in return? If not a financial blessing from God, then at least some kind of special recognition by my church through a special dinner or my name printed in the bulletin?
- Do I give out of obligation?
- Do I give foolishly into foolish pursuits?
- Do I give to God because of my overwhelming appreciation for what he's done for me?
- What does my giving reveal about my heart?

Pray about your answers to today's questions. Did God reveal something that needs to change in your heart? Lift whatever it is up to God and ask him to mold you into his disciple.

SATURDAY

Remember, giving isn't about a dollar figure as much as it is about obedience. Sometimes God will lead us to give a gift that exceeds our tithe by a number of zeroes. And sometimes, he'll tell us not to give anything more than the tithe. God will sometimes tell us not to give, even though our hearts may have been touched by the plea or moved by the particular situation. Are we willing to be obedient to God in those circumstances, too? Understand that there will always be more needs than we are called to meet. Even Jesus says we'll always have

the poor. Other times, like the woman who broke the expensive bottle of perfume over Jesus' feet, we need to lavish our love on God rather than meeting the needs of our fellow humans. We need to learn to hear God's voice regarding what and when to give. Perhaps God is telling you to give a homeless man five dollars, but you think he'll only use it to buy liquor, so you don't want to give. Regardless, obedience is always the better choice—what the man does with the money is between him and God. You're only accountable for you. Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I willing to allow God to tell me how much to give?
- Am I willing to give boldly when God allows?
- Do I want the best for myself and chose to give God the leftovers?
- Do I shortchange God by arguing over whether to give my tithe based on gross or net?
- Do I round down instead of rounding up?
- Do I try to justify not tithing on certain things?
- Do I give tithes cheerfully, or do I look for loopholes?
- How tightly do I cling to the things that will soon pass away?
- Can God trust me with his resources?

Pray about your answers to today's questions and ask God to help you be a cheerful giver, one who obeys his leading.

SUNDAY

When we give, we give God the opportunity to do the miraculous. When we give to our church we provide the opportunity for someone to hear the miraculous salvation message. We help provide the miracle of connecting people with the Lord and changing lives by bringing them closer to the One who loves them and died for them on the cross. When we give, we also offer God the opportunity to do a miracle in us. But mostly, when we give, we receive the miracle of being able to decrease while God increases in our lives. We revive the miracle of putting our own needs and wants aside in favor of God's ways. Our selfishness dies a little bit each time we write a tithe check. And the more these parts of ourselves die, the more we become like Him. Granted, that could be reward enough but it's not all he offers. Remember the monkey that wouldn't let go? He thought the biggest reward he could receive was a pitiful handful of seeds. And yet, by releasing his grasp, he could have been rewarded with something much greater: his very life. It's the same way with us. We might think that what's already in our grasp is as precious as it gets. We have no idea how richly God can reward us when we show a little faith. God is depending on this and if we will do this "Together" we will see miracles happen in and through this church!

Pray and ask God to perform miracles in you and in our church. Ask Him to use our church and each of us in it to His purpose.