

life group study guide

September 20, 2015

Money: God or Gift

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Chapter 8

Opening Question:

- Have you ever been caught off guard or surprised by the generosity of someone in your family, social circle, workplace, neighborhood, church? Why were you surprised? What was extraordinary about the act?
- Have you ever had someone question about one of your acts of generosity? Someone surprised or confused by a gift you gave to an organization, cause, person on the street, family member, tithe, etc.?) Why do you think it caught their attention?

1. If we are made in the image of God, than our giving mirrors God's giving. But it's not just the act of giving, but our motive and attitudes about giving that should mirror God.

- What are God's motives and attitudes about giving?
 - Check out John 3:16 *The Bible does not say, "for God thought it was best and most reasonable, that he gave." No, it was because God so loved the world, that he gave. He is the original cheerful giver. When we give, we reflect that joy.)*

2. *It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35) We are more blessed because giving "breaks us out of orbit around our possessions," explains Randy Alcorn. "We escape their gravity, entering a new orbit around our treasures in heaven."*

This goes against our culture's current and pervasive message – being blessed means having a lot and having all that you need and all that you want.

Jesus speaks a different word than what our culture speaks. His indicates that giving away our possessions frees us, refocuses us – and that is the true blessing that Scripture talks about!

- What do you think about this? Have you experienced this?
- What makes it harder or easier to give and break free from the "orbit around our possessions"?

3. Jesus tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [food, water, clothes] will be added to you". How are "all these things" provided to Christians who seek God's kingdom first? Often through God's people and their generous giving.

And when we see the supernatural provision of believers caring for and providing for the needs of other believers, then we find ourselves assured and freed -- we can give more generously in times of plenty because the Body of Christ takes care of us when we find ourselves in times of need.

- Do you think this cool principle of Matthew 6:33 is being played out in Christian communities? In our Christian community?
- Have you ever thought of Matthew 6:33 in this very cyclical and practical way before?

life group study guide

4. Which reason motivates you the most to be generous?
- Give because you are made in the image of God.
 - Give as an act of praise to God.
 - Give to demonstrate the value of Jesus.
 - Give to be blessed.
 - Give to care for others.
 - Give to serve Jesus.
5. ON ONE HAND -- *Any act of generosity expresses shades of truth. A desire to do good, show mercy, and work for justice (Micah 6:8) reveals God's imprint on our hearts. God created us for good works. (Ephesians 2:10) Giving that serves to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and promote justice provides a picture of the kingdom of God. (Luke 7:5)*

ON THE OTHER HAND -- *Our natural desire to give is affected by sin, and any act of benevolence we attempt is compromised by pride. We cannot please God in and of ourselves. (Romans 8:8) . . . When giving proceeds from an unredeemed heart, it serves to nurture human pride, self-sufficiency, and morality, drawing us away from God rather than toward him.*

- So is it possible for an unbeliever, someone who does not follow Jesus, to give generously, with the right heart, and please God?
 - Is it possible for a believer who follows Jesus to give with the wrong heart and offend God?
 - See # 6 below
6. *On a number of occasions, in both the Old and New Testaments, God rejects the sacrifice of his people, due to their hypocrisy, half-heartedness, and pretentious motives.*
- *Examples found in Genesis 4:5; Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:13; Amos 5:21-22; Malachi 1:6-14; Matthew 6:2; Acts 5:1-11.*
 - How can we make sure that our generosity spills out of our worship and love for him, and not out of hypocritical, half-hearted, pretentious motives?
7. *Godly generosity is an outward sign of inward transformation: rebirth by the power of the Holy Spirit. . . . when he touches your heart, your hand just opens.*
- If you came to Christ as an adult, did you notice a change in you regarding being generous?
 - What did it feel like? What did it look like?
 - If you didn't notice a change in your generosity, what explanation can you give?
8. Why are all four of these characteristics important? What aspect of biblical giving is most difficult for you and how can you work on it?
- Giving your first-fruits (not as an afterthought)
 - Cheerful giving (not "grumpy-giving")
 - Sacrificial giving (not convenient, easy, out-of-excess giving)
 - Regular giving (not giving that lacks discipline)
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9. *ON ONE HAND – Causes come and go like fads—whether they’re resolved or not, sadly. Only the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection in our place offers consistent, universal, and eternal hope. God’s chosen vehicle for this message is the church, so we have a responsibility to make sure she’s healthy.*

ON THE OTHER HAND – A generous lifestyle does not stop with the church, . . . Look for diverse and creative ways to be generous in your daily life. What organizations are doing good work in your community? How can you be generous in your workplace? Are there any families in your neighborhood experiencing hard times? . . . get in the habit of spontaneous generosity as well. Jesus celebrates many instances of spur-of-the-moment giving. (Luke 10:30-37; John 12:1-8; Matthew 19:21)

- How do you balance giving to the church and giving outside of the church?
 - What random act of generosity will you try this week?
10. *You can never out-give our generous God.*
- Praise God for all of his generous gifts – name as many as time allows.
 - Thank God for all of his generous gifts to come in heaven.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize opportunities to extend generosity in your daily life.

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