

# GROWTHguide

## "Practicing What Jesus Preached"

November 19, 2017



### THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 6:24, Matthew 6:19-21,  
Matthew 7:24-27, 1 Timothy 6:17-19,  
Matthew 6:1-4, 25-34 and 7:1-12, Matthew 5-7

### DAY 1

#### Read [Matthew 6:24](#)

In his sermon *The Use of Money*, John Wesley said that we are to gain all we can "without harming yourself or your neighbor in soul or body." We might misinterpret his words if we don't pay attention to the fact that he discourages gaining money by being a workaholic, neglecting our families, damaging our health through lack of rest, damaging our spirit through lack of Sabbath, or by cheating or being unjust to others. If we gain all we can through godly means while maintaining loving, attentive, just relationships then we are not serving money and we enable ourselves to serve God.

- **Do you maintain a proper balance between activities related to gaining wealth and activities related to serving others and building relationships?**
- **If you are still working with the purpose of earning a wage, do you cultivate a proper balance between work, rest and play?**
- **Do you come by your money in ways that are just? If you are a business owner, do you pay your workers fairly? If you are a landlord, are your rent rates fair? Do you invest in businesses**

## **or companies that inject poison into our culture or environment?**

Spend some time thinking about how you have gained the money that you control and pray for guidance on where you need to modify your practices when it comes to earning and gaining wealth.

### **DAY 2**

**Read [Matthew 6:19-21](#)**

John Wesley also encouraged his readers and listeners to save all they could and give all they could. He put it this way, *"**Save all you can** by cutting off every expense that only serves to indulge the foolish desires of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life. In your living and dying, waste nothing on sin or on foolishness for yourself or for your children. And finally, **give all you can**...Give to yourself, your household, the family of faith, and all humankind in such a way that you can render a good account of your stewardship when you can no longer be God's steward."*

This teaching reflects what Jesus taught his disciples when he told them that they had to choose to devote themselves to either earthy or heavenly treasures.

- **Reflect on your spending habits. Do they demonstrate a priority on God and on the work he calls you to do?**
- **Think of your monthly resources as ten apples. Do you give one apple to God at the beginning of the month, or do you nibble away at that apple to buy the latest gadget, live beyond your means, or enjoy an extra night or two dining out each month? When you reach the end of the month, have you given God his apple or just an apple core?**

When we share our resources with poor, vulnerable, lost, and lonely people in our community, we not only serve

their physical needs, but we serve their emotional and spiritual needs as well. When St. Paul ministers to our neighbors through outreach, we are proclaiming that we love them because God loved us first and we offer proof that they are valuable in God's eyes.

**Pray about the ways that you can help your church share the love of Christ in our community.**

## **DAY 3**

**Read [Matthew 7:24-27](#) and [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#)**

Jesus used the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Homebuilders to teach us about the importance of having a firm faith foundation based on his teachings. The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy to teach the faithful to place their hope in God, who provides all that is needed, and to be rich in good deeds and generosity. These are eternal rather than worldly treasures.

- **What is your foundation based on? Does your life reflect a character motivated by fear, self-interest, pride or ambition? In contrast, do others see you living a life of love, generosity, joy, humility, gratitude, and trust?**
- **Reflect on the kind of foundation upon which you are building your spiritual home.**

**Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you honestly assess your faith foundation and to determine whether it is like sandy soil or as solid as bedrock.**

## **DAY 4**

**Read [Matthew 6:1-4](#), [25-34](#) and [7:1-12](#)**

Jesus taught us to give in secret so that we won't be tempted to give to gain favor or approval of others. Our giving should be motivated by our desire to honor God with our first-fruits. He also tells us not to worry or be afraid,

and that we are not to judge others. Certain attitudes and motivations can erode our faith foundation and make us more like the foolish builder than the wise builder.

- **Do you give begrudgingly, only so that others will approve of you or so you will look like a "good Christian"?**
- **Do you hold back on what you give to God because you worry that you won't have enough?**
- **Do you withhold an offering because you are angry about a staff change or other decision made by the leaders of your church?**
- **Do you keep more for yourself than you really need so that you can live in a way that demonstrates you are "successful" by the world's standards?**

Reflect on your answers to these questions. If your motivation for giving to your church is to gain favor of other people or to ensure that all decisions made by your leaders meet with your approval then you may need to consider how your motivation honors God. If you withhold offerings because of fear or worry, ask God to help you cultivate a greater ability to trust that God provides. God wants you to live joyfully and with gratitude.

## **DAY 5**

**Read the entire [Sermon on the Mount; Matthew 5-7](#)**

Jesus reminds us that building a rock-like foundation involves two things when he said *"everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice"* is like a wise builder. We are to hear or read his words **and** put them into practice. We hear, then do. Learn, then act. Many of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount relate to the characteristics that build our faith foundation. Some of those teachings relate to wealth and its use, and how we interact with other people. This includes how we use our resources to serve others.

- **Does your life reflect Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?**
- **Does the way you spend your time, talent and treasure reflect a Kingdom focus or a self-centered focus?**
- **Do you embrace some of the Lord's words but ignore what he taught us about money and its proper place in our lives?**

This Sunday, November 26, you have an opportunity to put Christ's teaching about money into practice by making a financial commitment to the ministry budget of your church. Your pastors have reflected on these questions and prayed as we've prepared the messages for our teaching on "Extravagant Generosity." We are prepared to practice what we preach, and we invite you to join us by praying about your own foundations and your willingness to give generously and joyfully.

## DAY 6

Today is a day of reflection and prayer. Take time to think through how you will live into a new mindset of generosity. Please ask God for guidance as you discern how you will support St. Paul in the year ahead and then act on what you and God have determined together.

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