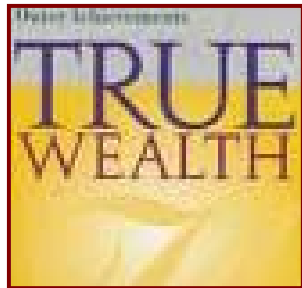


Melva's Corner



Living to Give! (Financial Freedom) Part II

September 24, 2007

Central Truth: God has placed in our trust a measure of time, a unique set of talents and sufficient treasure to carry out His will for our lives.

As we continue our study on giving let me share six steps you can take to appropriate God's abundant blessings through your faithful stewardship.

1. Recognize That Everything You "Own" Actually Belongs to God

All that we have, we possess by the grace and gift of God. Everything belongs to Him. The psalmist records, **"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."** God's ownership is eternal and unchanging. He never has given up this right - and never will.

As Christian stewards we must realize that in Christ "we live and move and have our being." Jesus Christ created us. He bought us with His precious blood. And God anointed Him as our Lord. Thus, the whole of our life - our personality, influence, material substance, everything - is His, even our successes.

God has placed in our trust a measure of time, a unique set of talents and sufficient treasure to carry out His will for our lives. Our task as faithful stewards is to manage those blessings to bring the maximum glory to His name.

2. Realize It Is More Blessed to Give Than Receive

The Book of Acts records the words of the Lord, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." I first heard this as a growing girl, then as a young Christian. Then, I could not comprehend how giving could be better than receiving. Now that I have been a Christian for many years, I truly understand from my own experience and through observing many others why it is "more blessed to give" than receive.

Giving produces abundance. When you give freely of yourself and of your possessions as a material expression of your spiritual obedience to Christ, God in turn meets your needs abundantly. This is true whether you are "rich or poor," whether you serve God in a land that is blessed with great material wealth or in a poverty-stricken part of the world. The apostle Paul records:

"If you give little, you will get little. A farmer who plants just a few seeds will get only a small crop, but if he plants much, he will reap much. Everyone must make up his own mind as to how much he should give. Don't force anyone to give more than he really wants to, for cheerful givers are the ones God prizes. God is able to make it up to you by giving you everything you need and more, so that there will not only be enough for your own needs, but plenty left over to give joyfully to others.

For God, who gives seed to the farmer to plant, and later on, good crops to harvest and eat, will give you more and more seed to plant and will make it grow so that you can give away more and more fruit from your harvest.

Yes, God will give you much so that you can give away much, and when we take your gifts to those who need them they will break out into thanksgiving and praise to God for your help."

Most Christians have not learned to give, either out of their abundance or out of their poverty, and therefore, are not experiencing the reality of that promise. As a result, they feel unfulfilled and don't understand why.

You can never outgive God. It is a law of God that His blessings back to you always greatly exceed what you give to Him.

The truths of God's holy, inspired Word are universal. The principle of abundant blessing is not just for the rich and famous or for those who live in a land of wealth and

opportunity; it is for everyone everywhere who obeys God and follows the principles of blessing given in His Word. I will share more on this later.

Giving begins an endless circle of joy. God gives; you receive. You give; He receives, He then multiplies your gift back to you in the form of additional supply. It is important to remember that God is the one who initiates this process of blessing. The purpose of the return is not just to reward you for giving, thus completing the circle again and again.

Although God owns all the wealth in the universe, few people are willing to share the portion of resources which He has entrusted to them. When someone does begin to give, God releases additional abundance to them so they can give even more. If we break this process on the receiving end of the circle, He is likely to look for someone else whom He can trust and through whom He can channel His blessings. The Book of Proverbs records:

"One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

I know a man who considers himself an average person. At the age of twelve, he found his first job working in a small grocery store after school. From the beginning, he gave at least 10 percent of his income to the work of the Lord. Through the years, he worked hard, and God blessed him abundantly.

This same man married young and he and his wife raised their three children while he grew in his career. At age 29, after eleven years of managing supermarket meat departments, he began his own wholesale/retail meat business. At that time, he and his wife and children made a family decision to give at least 15 percent of their \$6,000 yearly earnings to the Lord.

God began to increase their income immediately from \$6,000 to \$21,000, then \$37,000, \$62,000, \$85,000, \$100,000 and more a year.

"Fifteen years later we sold the meat business to a larger company, wrapped up our assets in nice, neat investments and went into self-supported Christian ministry for two years," He says. "We later heard of the evangelistic work of a Christian

ministry in foreign countries. Their work is flourishing, and it takes little to maintain these missionary families in full time ministry compared to our own - less than \$100 per month in some countries.

"A little fast meat-market math convinced me that I could go back into business, earn money to support these missionaries and multiply myself fifty to one hundred times. By giving \$12,000 a year, I could contribute \$240,000 to God's work within just twenty years."

Things worked out much better than he expected. He fulfilled his \$240,000 commitment in just ten years, channeling the bulk of his funds into a comprehensive plan for world evangelism designed to help reach the millions who have not yet heard about Christ.

God's promise in Proverbs 11:24, 25 is for everyone. Whether rich or poor, you, too, can give to receive, to receive to give again. God knows your heart and whether He can trust you to end of the process, as the above example emphasizes.

Permit me to give you a word of caution here. Do not be disappointed if God doesn't work in your life the same as the example. The various possibilities of Gods' blessings are endless. He may have a different plan for you. God knows your true needs and you must give Him the freedom to do His very best work in your life. He may give you improved health and strength to do your work. He may lead you to a better job, help you decrease your expenses, or change your spending habits so you can live better on your present income. Or He may teach you to be content with what you have so you can enjoy a greater sense of fulfillment in life. Paul affirms this:

"I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Many Christians misunderstand the meaning of blessing. Like Paul, Job was a man who experienced both prosperity and deprivation. True prosperity is living and giving at the level to which God has called you with all your needs met by His supply.

3. Give By Faith

Simply defined, giving by faith is taking God at His Word and giving generously in anticipation of His faithful provision.

The premise of this concept is three-fold. First, God is the absolute source for your supply. Second, giving is based on His resources, not your own. Third, Christ is your link to God's inexhaustible riches.

The apostle Paul includes these precepts in his letter to the Christians at Philippi in which he says:

"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Let's look at each for a moment.

God shall supply. Living in a humanistic society, it is easy to believe that man is your source of wealth. When in need, it's easy to look to people and institutions for help. Indeed, God uses them in His process of provision, but they are only the instruments - not the source - of your supply.

According to His riches. Our heavenly Father holds the treasures for heaven and earth in His hands. Jesus Christ claimed all authority in heaven and on earth. Our Lord's supply is not based on the size of your need, but on the enormity of His riches and His authority to disburse them. In good times and bad, His reserves remain stable and inexhaustible.

By Christ Jesus. You claim God's abundant blessings through Christ. Our Lord laid aside His riches in heaven to identify with you in every area of your human need, ultimately dying on the cross for your sins. When He returned to His Father, God reinvested Him with all that He had laid aside, including His inexhaustible riches.

4. Realize That What You Sow, You Will Reap

On the third day of creation God commanded, **"Let the earth burst forth with every sort of grass and seed-bearing plant, and fruit trees with seeds inside the fruit, so that these seeds will produce the kinds of plants and fruits they came from."**

This principle applies spiritually as well as physically. Paul writes, "A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

The apostle makes it clear that the law of sowing and reaping applies to the use of our material goods as well, as previously examined in II Corinthians 9. This law embraces four basic principles.

First, to reap anything, you must first plant a seed. Whether your gift is measured in cash or goods or any other medium of exchange, whatever you give will return to you because what you give is a seed that you sow.

Second, to reap a bountiful harvest you must sow your best seed. Merely sowing for the sake of reaping is not enough. God asks for your finest because He uses what you give as the basis of His supply. There is no second best with God. His provision in response to your obedience is perpetually perfect and always abundant. Since He gave you His very best - His only Son - you grieve the Spirit of God when you do not give Him your best.

This means that the best of your life - the best of your time, the best of your talents, the best of your treasure, the best of everything you have - should be on the altar of sacrifice to God.

In some cultures, the seed may be the first and best of one's produce or other tangible foods. For example, Abraham willingly gave a tenth of all his spoils of war to Melchizedek, the king of Salem and high priest of the Most High God, as a testimony to God's faithfulness in giving him the victory. No doubt these spoils included a wide variety of valuable treasures. On another occasion, after Moses sanctified the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the leaders of Israel brought covered wagons drawn by oxen as gifts to the Lord.

Third, whatever you give, you reap according to the amount you sow. This biblical principle is basic to life and it applies in every culture and economic custom, whether free enterprise, socialism, or a system where tangible foods are bartered.

Fourth, an abundant harvest springs from the most fertile soil. No intelligent farmer would think of planting inferior seed in

poorly prepared soil using worn-out equipment. Rather, he would buy the choicest seed and prepare the soil thoroughly with the finest equipment and fertilizers he could afford.

Like planting good seed in fertile ground, your task as a steward is to seek the greatest possible return for the sake of God's kingdom. You cannot appraise good stewardship by the amount of your gifts, but by how wisely you invest your resources. Good stewardship of any gift is determined by how well it reflects the will of God.

In making decisions, I believe in using the "sound mind" principle of Scripture recorded in **II Timothy 1:7**, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

The "sound mind" referred to in this verse means a well-balanced mind, one that is under the control for the Holy Spirit, "remade" according to Romans 12:1, 2:

"Therefore, my brother, I implore you by God's mercies to offer your very selves to Him, a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for His acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern for the present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God and to know it is good, acceptable, and perfect."

There is a vast difference between the inclination of the natural or carnal man to use "common sense" and that of the spiritual man to follow the "sound mind" principle. One depends upon the wisdom of man without benefit of God's wisdom and power; the other, having the mind of Christ, receives wisdom and guidance from God moment by moment through faith.

I encourage you to use the "sound mind" principle to help determine where to invest in Christ's kingdom. Avoid emotional giving. Giving on impulse just for the sake of giving or contributing where your gifts are likely to be misused or wasted is not only poor stewardship, but is also contrary to the will of God and grieves the Spirit. Perhaps you have received requests from organizations inviting you to invest in their various projects. Carefully evaluate the worthiness of the ministry you choose and the sincerity of the people involved, and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Find out the conditions of the "soil". Investigate the financial soundness and integrity of the organization soliciting your support; determine what percentage of your donation will actually go to the project and whether your gift will really be used for the glory of God. I also encourage you to evaluate - in terms of discipleship and evangelism - the fruitfulness of the church or other organizations which invite your contributions.

5. Give to Glorify God

As a steward for God's resources, you have but one purpose - to glorify Him. It is easy to let the day-to-day demands on your finances turn your eyes from this aim unless you clearly define your priorities. God's holy Word does this for you.

Your number one priority is God. Your second priority is your family. Since the family was the first institution formed by our Creator, no conflict exists between the preeminence of God and the priority of family. Rather, meeting the needs of your family is a scriptural mandate and an evidence of faith. Helping nonbelievers see the life-changing power for Jesus Christ as a result of your caring for the poor, the orphans and the widows and your gifts of time, talent and treasure to agencies concerned for the welfare of the community glorify God as well.

But your top priority is to love, obey and glorify God. Putting God and the fulfillment of our Lord's Great Commission first in your time, talents and treasure must be the priority goal of your stewardship. This involves giving to the kingdom of God through your local church and mission organizations which faithfully exalt our Lord, proclaim His holy, inspired Word and actively work toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission. It is poor stewardship to invest resources which God has entrusted to you in any church or mission cause which is not directly related to discipleship, evangelism, and the fulfillment of our Lord's commands, including the Great Commission.

6. Give From the Heart

Good stewardship involves more than the mere knowledge and application of the principles and priorities of giving. Motives are an essential part of the picture as well, for they determine your reasons for giving.

Godly motives stem from a cheerful, loving heart for God. We give to please God and express our love to Him. We give out of obedience to our Lord's command to lay up treasures in heaven. We give to be a channel of God's abundant resources to a desperately needy world. We give to help fulfill the Great Commission and, thus, help reach the world for Christ. Maintaining right motives through the power of the Holy Spirit is essential if we are to accomplish this objective to the glory of God.

Why is it, then, that we so often fail in this goal? It is because we follow our deceitful hearts and live self-centered lives. Bowing to this materialistic world, we fail to use the keys which unlock God's abundant blessings in our lives and as a result, plunge into financial bondage.

How can you avoid this? In the next message I want to show you how to manage your finances and release your faith to experience the adventure in giving which God intended for every Christian.

Scriptural References:

**“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
(Matthew 6:21)**