

Lesson 2

More than a Tithe: Model of a Generous Heart

Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking

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Here is a great video you could show your group on being a joyful giver:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAIiKjeIFa0>

Mark 12.41 – 44 / Matthew 6.19 - 21

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- 1. Try to picture this scene in your mind. Where did it take place? How does this scene differ from how we do offerings?**

Between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women there was the Gate Beautiful. It may well be that Jesus had gone to sit quietly there after the argument and the tension of the Court of the Gentiles and the discussions in the cloisters. In the Court of the Women there were thirteen collecting boxes called "The Trumpets," because they were so shaped. Each of them was for a special purpose, for instance to buy corn or wine or oil for the sacrifices. They were for contributions for the daily sacrifices and expenses of the Temple. Many people threw in quite considerable contributions. Then came a widow. She flung in two mites. The coin so called was a lepton (<G3016>), which literally means a thin one. It was the smallest of all coins and was worth one fortieth of one pence. And yet Jesus said that her tiny contribution was greater than all the others, for the others had thrown in what they could spare easily enough and still have plenty left, while the widow had flung in everything she had. — Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT).

- 2. It is always a good idea to look at a passage emotionally. How do you think this woman felt as she approached the place of giving?**

Then a poor widow came along. She probably went almost unnoticed in the hustle and bustle that marked the temple courtyard—and she probably liked it that way. Unlike her wealthy neighbors, she could not afford to make a hefty donation. In fact, she could not really afford to give anything. But still she came, hoping (I imagine) to slip unobtrusively alongside the money box and quietly drop in her offering—two small coins that were all but worthless. — Blue, R., & Berndt, J. (2010). *Generous living: Finding contentment through giving*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

- 3. How do you think the rich people felt?**

I can imagine the scene. Jesus sat across from the temple treasury, watching people make their contributions. Many rich people, dressed in fine clothes, approached the offering box with a sense

of religious pomp and ceremony. The Bible says they “threw” their money in—noting, I would guess, the satisfying “ch-ching” the coins made as they fell. — Blue, R., & Berndt, J. (2010). *Generous living: Finding contentment through giving*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

4. Can you think of examples of people today who seemed to be motivated to give by a “look at me” attitude?

Public giving such as this setting required promotes self-conscious ostentation. Consider the man who stood up in a meeting where they were taking subscriptions for donations and said, “I want to give \$100—anonymously.”

Would the stars have turned out to support “Live Aid” if there were no cameras and they could not stand with Stevie Wonder to sing “We Are the World”? What would happen to our great national charities today without celebrity benefits, or published subscribers’ lists, or bronze plaques, or pictures taken with crippled children? — Hughes, R. K. (1989). *Mark: Jesus, servant and savior. Preaching the Word* (130). Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.

5. How much did the widow give? How does your translation have it?

Two mites. The word translated mite denotes a small coin made of brass, the smallest in use among the Jews. The precise value cannot now be easily estimated. It was much less than any coin we have, as the farthing was less than an English farthing. It was in value about three mills and a half, or one third of a cent. — *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*.

6. Have you ever been tempted to not give or not serve because you felt like your contribution was so small?

I was asked to speak at the funeral of a man who had helped develop the Boeing 747 aircraft. After the service I spoke with the widow and commented on what a remarkable thing her late husband had done.

“The truth is, he worked on a little switchbox smaller than a loaf of bread,” she said. “That’s all he worked on for fifteen years. But when that 747 lifted off the ground for the first time, it was the happiest day of his life.”

He worked on a tiny switchbox for more than a decade, yet the Boeing 747 couldn’t have lifted off without this man’s contribution. Often we think our seemingly small efforts aren’t very important. But when the great kingdom of God “lifts off,” we’ll be thrilled to find out that our efforts were essential. —M. Craig Barnes, in a sermon delivered at Christianity Today International (September 19, 2000) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). *1001 illustrations that connect* (535–536). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

7. Jesus was watching how much the people gave. Do you think it would affect our giving if we were aware that Jesus was watching how much we give?

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury” (v. 41). The treasury where they placed their offerings consisted of thirteen brass treasure chests called trumpets because they were shaped like inverted horns, narrow at the top and enlarged at the bottom.

According to the Mishnah, each of the chests bore inscriptions designating what the offerings were for: “‘New Shekel dues,’ ‘Old Shekel dues,’ ‘Bird offerings,’ ‘Young birds for the whole offering,’ ‘Wood,’ ‘Frankincense,’ ‘Gold for the Mercy-seat,’ and, on six of them ‘Freewill-offerings.’” Because of the Passover, the treasury was a most busy place as both the local inhabitants and pilgrims crowded past the thirteen shopharoth (chests) and inserted their offerings into the narrow brass mouths made shiny by the constant friction of worshipers’ hands.

Here amidst the noisy din, Jesus found a place to observe the givers without drawing attention to himself. Have you ever sat at the airport or the shopping mall and watched the people over your newspaper or coffee? Jesus was a “people watcher.” He was not only watching their actions, but their motives. Here we have a divine revelation: neither the widow (the principal focus of Jesus’ attention) nor the rest of the people had any idea they were being watched! We too are being watched in our least conscious moments. As George MacDonald said, “When we feel as if God is nowhere, He is watching over us with an eternal consciousness, above and beyond our every hope and fear.”

What a staggering moment it is for a worshiping soul when one first awakes to this reality. Jesus really is watching. As Hannah of old said, the Lord is weighing our actions (1 Samuel 2:3). This means that every action is important. — Hughes, R. K. (1989). *Mark: Jesus, servant and savior. Preaching the Word* (128–130). Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.

8. Matthew 6.19 – 21. What does this passage teach us about why she gave so much?

In order to get all the sweetness out of this verse, we need to understand that “heart” here means a great deal more than it means in modern usage. Generally we think of heart as a name for the affections. But the Bible uses it for the whole inner man, the core of our total being, the wellspring of all we do. This means that Christ is telling us that where our treasure is, there will be all our total being. Not only will our affections focus on our treasure, but our entire self will be entwined with it. And as a result, what happens to our treasure happens to us. “Where our treasure is, there will be our inner being—our total person.” — Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom. Preaching the Word* (209). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

9. Why does it not make any sense to store up treasures here?

Let's say you spend a week at Motel 6. How likely would it be for you to take all your money and spend it decorating your motel room? How probable is it that you would clean out your bank

account to purchase van Goghs or paintings of Elvis on velvet or whatever it is that your taste runs to?

Not very. You wouldn't even be tempted, because the motel room is not home. You're only going to be there a little while. It would be foolish to waste the treasure of your one and only life on a temporary residence.

Smart players are clear on what lasts and what doesn't. So Jesus says it is wise to store up treasure in what's eternal: God and people.

This is Motel 6. Your "room"—your home and furniture and clothes and possessions—will last the equivalent of a few seconds compared to the eternity that will be occupied by your soul. It's not bad to stay in a place and enjoy it while you're there. But Jesus says don't store up treasure in Motel 6. It's not home. You're only going to be here a little while. If you're going to stay up nights dreaming, dream about something better than how to upgrade your motel room. — Ortberg, J. (2008). When the game is over, it all goes back in the box. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

10. What is the difference between a treasure and money?

Certainly this is a warning to those who are rich, but this teaching is not for the wealthy only. Our text does not say, "Do not lay up for yourselves money on earth." It says, "treasures," and the Greek word used here is an inclusive term. Certainly it refers to money, but it is not confined to money. What Jesus has in mind are people who get their entire satisfaction from things that belong to this world only. He warns us against focusing our ambitions, interests, and hopes on the things of this life. Even if you have not set your mind on the greedy accumulation of great wealth, something else—for example, a home—could be a sinful treasure. I have seen young couples purchase their first home and shrivel with their new blessing. All their thoughts and energies were spent dreaming of chairs and sofas, the right antiques, colors, carpets—what they do not have. This is not a unique malady of the rich. There is also the treasure of family. Some people put family before everything. Some mothers and fathers think only of their children—a form of narcissism and selfishness. When we give such primacy to our family, there is no time for our neighbors and our community. Though one may not have a fixation on wealth, he may have "treasures" that are just as deadly—perhaps a CD collection, a position in the workplace, a memory. If anything in this world is everything to you, it is an earthly treasure. — Hughes, R. K. (2001). The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom. Preaching the Word (207). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

11. How do we store up treasures in heaven?

The reason Jesus gives for prohibiting the storing of such treasure is that it will be destroyed. You cannot take it with you. It is temporal, not eternal. An old miser called his doctor, lawyer, and minister to his deathbed. "They say you can't take it with you," the dying man said. "But I'm going to try. I have three envelopes with \$30,000 cash in each one. I want each of you to take an envelope, and as they lower my casket, throw in the envelopes!" Each man tossed in his envelope as requested. But on the way home the minister confessed, "I needed the money for the church, so I

took out \$10,000 and threw only \$20,000 into the grave.” The doctor said, “I, too, must confess. I’m building a clinic. So I took \$20,000 and threw in only \$10,000.” The lawyer said, “Gentlemen, I’m ashamed of you. I threw in a personal check for the full amount.” The old miser’s material fixation produced a futile scheme to take his wealth with him, but the scheme did not even survive his burial because of the materialism of his three friends. — Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom. Preaching the Word* (207). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

12. Here is one to think about: do you own anything that you could not be happy without?

Jesus’ words are an axiom of life without exceptions. “Where your treasure is, there your heart [your being] will be also.” Where is your heart? On earthly treasure? If so, your treasure will suffer attack by moth, rust, and thieves, and it will be destroyed. And there is a danger that your heart will become like your treasure. As George Macdonald says:

One day you will be compelled to see, nay, to feel your heart as God sees it; and to know that the cankered thing which you have within you, a prey to the vilest diseases, is indeed the center of your being, your very heart.

Or is your heart set on heavenly treasure? If so, your treasure is incorruptible, and so is your heart. — Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom. Preaching the Word* (209). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

13. I have a poll here on what people said was most difficult to quit spending money on. What do you guess people said it was most difficult to quit spending money on?

What spending habits are the most difficult to break? A Harris Interactive poll of 1,202 women discovered these habits are toughest to control:

- eating out or getting takeout: 49 percent
- shopping for clothes: 28 percent
- daily coffee fix: 17 percent
- personal beauty products: 14 percent

—Mary Cadden and Julie Snider, “Money Matters,” *USA Today “Snapshots”* (February 6, 2006) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). *1001 illustrations that connect* (506–507). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

14. What benefits come to the generous?

An article, “Doing good deeds can improve health, make you happier, scientists suggest” by Erin Anderssen in the *Globe and Mail* describes a series of studies supporting our belief that giving also benefits the giver: • One study revealed that people who exhibit higher levels of altruism get a “helper’s high,” a release of endorphins. This high can “give the immune system a boost, speed

recovery from surgery and cut down on those restless nights.” — [The Power of Giving: How Giving Back Enriches Us All](#) by Azim Jamal, Harvey McKinnon

15. What price do those who are not generous pay?

Whatever we may “lose” in the moment of giving, whether it be time, money, or opportunities, will be more than matched by all we gain. We believe the gains are immense and longer lasting. They include deeper friendships, teaching others generosity, greater personal integrity, a sense of freedom, joy, and even love. As Piero Ferrucci says so eloquently, “Being kind is the simplest way to become who we really are.” — [The Power of Giving: How Giving Back Enriches Us All](#) by Azim Jamal, Harvey McKinnon

16. Why do you personally want to be a generous person? What motivates you to be generous?

Academic research demonstrates that giving to others benefits people physically and emotionally. An article in the May 1988 issue of American Health magazine described a study in Michigan that showed that regular volunteer work increases life expectancy. The study found that men who did no volunteer work were two and a half times more likely to die during the study than men who volunteered at least once a week. The article described other benefits that the researchers measured. Giving, in the form of volunteer work:

- enhances your immune system,
- lowers cholesterol levels,
- strengthens your heart,
- decreases the incidence of chest pains, and
- generally reduces stress. .”

— [The Power of Giving: How Giving Back Enriches Us All](#) by Azim Jamal, Harvey McKinnon

17. Suppose a friend said, “I just don’t want to give. I’d rather spend it on myself. I have needs of my own.” How would you respond? What would you (want to) tell them?

Consider the following statistics:

- One out of every four people in the world is starving.
- As many as 1.5 billion people in the world do not have enough clean water.
- At least 20 million people are suffering the horror of war, imprisonment, and torture.
- Every few seconds a child dies from a preventable disease. • One-seventh of the world’s population is illiterate. In the United States, the world’s richest country, 3 million people are

homeless each year. — [The Power of Giving: How Giving Back Enriches Us All](#) by Azim Jamal, Harvey McKinnon

18. Have you ever known anyone who gave sacrificially, as the woman did in the Mark 12.41 – 44 story? Who has a story?

RUBY STARED AT HER DAUGHTER in disbelief. “How bad is it?” she asked.

Ruby’s daughter had quit her job teaching kindergarten to learn more about the business her father, Bob, had started some fifteen years earlier. The company manufactured water treatment chemicals, and although neither Ruby nor her daughter knew anything about chemistry or running a business, they figured it was time to start learning. Bob had been diagnosed with cancer and was not expected to live.

Ruby knew that business had been slow, but nothing could have prepared her for her daughter’s report. The company, which had been generating very little income, had unpaid bills that were thirty-six months overdue! Unwilling to burden his wife with the bleakness of their situation, Bob had kept the indebtedness a secret.

Ruby felt numb from the shock. First, she had had to accept the very real probability that her husband—who was already too sick to get out of bed—would die. Now, she realized, there was a good chance she would lose the business as well. She could think of nothing to do except pray. As she knelt before God, she half expected him to tell her what a wonderful woman she was, and that he shouldn’t be doing all this to her. Instead, she heard simply one word.

Give.

Ruby knew what the Bible said about giving. She knew that it said things such as “Give and it shall be given to you” and that it offered promises about how God would pour out his blessings on people who gave. As the Lord spoke, Ruby understood that he intended for her to take these promises seriously. He wanted her to give.

Right away Ruby went to her husband’s bedside to ask for his permission. Could she, she wondered, ask his secretary to write a business check to their church?

“Go for it,” Bob said, figuring they had nothing to lose.

The next morning Ruby went to her husband’s office and instructed the secretary to write a check for one thousand dollars. It might as well have been a million, Ruby thought. She had no idea where the money would come from.

The secretary protested. “We’re not going to do that!” she exclaimed. “That doesn’t make any sense at all—there’s no money in the account. And even if we had the cash, we’ve got a whole stack of big bills to pay!”

Ruby knew she faced strong opposition. The woman had held her post for seven years and knew the business better than Ruby did. She probably considered Ruby a well-meaning, but ignorant, meddler.

“If you want to keep your job,” Ruby said evenly, “you’ll write that check.”

“All right,” the secretary conceded. “It’s no skin off my nose if you want to lose the company.”

A week later Bob died. Ruby forgot all about the check. It was not until a month later that she even revisited the business she had inherited. When she did, she dedicated the failing company to the Lord. “Whatever you give to us,” Ruby vowed, “we will give back to you in tithes and offerings—ten percent plus.”

When she finished praying, Ruby paid a visit to the secretary. “Whatever happened to that check we wrote to the church?” she asked.

“Ruby,” the secretary replied, “you won’t believe this. There was enough money in the account to cover it—although I don’t know where we got the funds.”

“Write another one.”

The secretary stared at her new boss. “Never!” she exclaimed. “Bob would not have done that.”

Again, Ruby prevailed. And again, there was money available to cover the check. In fact, for the next year Ruby contributed one thousand dollars per month, ever mindful of God’s command to “give.” And every check cleared—even when Ruby thought there was next-to-nothing in the bank.

The business began to flourish. Within a year all the overdue bills had been paid and the company was in the black. Ruby decided it was time to increase their giving to two thousand dollars per month. This time the secretary did not protest.

Year after year Ruby raised her monthly giving, slowly at first and then with bigger jumps. Today the company gives away twenty thousand dollars each month. Not long ago a banker reviewed the company’s accounts. Noting Ruby’s pattern of generous giving—even when there was not enough cash to meet all the company’s bills—he simply shook his head. “I don’t understand it,” he admitted, “but you must be doing something right.”

The stories Ruby tells of how God has met people’s needs through her giving are nothing short of remarkable. One time, for example, she could not shake from her mind the image of a young, single mother she recognized from her church. The woman’s name was Sheila; beyond that, Ruby knew very little about her life or her financial circumstances.

As Ruby prayed for Sheila, she sensed that the woman had a financial need. “How much?” Ruby asked the Lord.

God gave Ruby a specific dollar amount. She wrote the number down and then contacted the church's assistant pastor. "Does Sheila need any money?" she asked.

"Not that I know of," the pastor replied. "Why do you ask?"

Ruby recounted her story, telling the pastor the amount she thought Sheila needed.

As it happened, the pastor and his wife had already planned to have dinner with Sheila that very evening. Sheila seemed perfectly fine—until part way through the meal, when she broke down in tears. "I need so much," she confessed. "I haven't wanted to burden anyone with my problems, but I don't know where to turn."

As Sheila divulged her concerns, the pastor grabbed a notepad and said, "Tell me exactly what you need and how much you think everything will cost."

Somewhat puzzled by the request, Sheila nonetheless began listing her needs. "The roof leaks," she said, "and the lawn mower is broken."

"What else?"

Sheila ticked off several more pressing financial problems, tagging each one with a rough estimate of what it would cost for replacement or repair. When she finished, the pastor totaled the numbers and stared, almost speechless, at his pad. He couldn't wait to call Ruby.

He saw her at the post office the next morning, even before he had a chance to make the call. "Ruby!" the pastor cried. "You're not going to believe this. Remember how much money you thought Sheila needed? You were right—right down to the penny!" Laughing with delight, the pastor swung Ruby around right there in the post office, oblivious to the scene they created.

Since then, Ruby and Sheila have become close friends. "It's amazing what God can do with a life when you give everything to him," Ruby observes. "If he has your heart, he automatically has everything—including your money. You just don't hold anything back." — Blue, R., & Berndt, J. (2010). *Generous living: Finding contentment through giving*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

19. What do you want to recall from today's discussion?

20. How can we support one another in prayer this week?