

# **The Disciplines of a Godly Life: STEWARDSHIP-3 The Stewardship of Giving**

This morning I have a question for each of us to ponder. As we honestly look at God's Word and how the Lord has revealed His desires about our stewardship of our money – what should be our response to Him? Specifically, as we look at the Old Testament record, “God do You really expect less of me – who has Your Holy Spirit within and lives in the wealthiest society in human history – than You demanded of the poorest Israelite?”

Life was hard in Bible times. Like much of the non-industrialized world today, men awoke at dawn, trudged to the fields and picked away by hand at the soil, the rocks, and the weeds. They plowed with wooden yokes and plows tied on with rope and leather to oxen. Planting, plowing, pruning, and harvesting – all were done by hand. At sundown they drudged home to where the women had also labored by hand all day just to gather and prepare food so they all could eat by the dim light of a smoking lamp and sleep the sleep of the laborer.

Food as it was harvested was carefully stored for the long months when there were no crops. Pests, rodents and mold all were constant threats to the food supply. Drought and locusts could spell famine at any time.

So went the life of the farmers, herdsman faced similar long and hard days. Sleeping most often with the flock in caves and stone enclosures, life was far from comfortable.

The longer archaeologists work in Israel, the more they find. Old Testament burial customs involved the use of extended family burial caves where the bones were stored for generations in the back of the caves in special crypts. The end result being that an examination of these remains gives great insight into the life of ancient Israel. One cave found in the 1970's contained among the bones – 762 human teeth. An American dental school examined these teeth and their findings are fascinating.

Those teeth represented 51 different individuals. Of them:

- 13 or about 25% never lived to age ten;
- Only 4 in 51 or 8% lived to the age of 60;
- All 51 individuals their teeth showed almost complete diets of rough grain.

So why the history lesson? Because that was the world of Israel, the people of God's Word. What did God expect under the strict code of the LAW from these hard working farmers and herdsmen that made up His people? What did the Lord God Almighty demand from them?

It seems<sup>1</sup> fair to ask as we look at the Old Testament record, "God do You really expect less of me – who has Your Holy Spirit within and lives in the wealthiest society in human history – than You demanded of the poorest Israelite?"

Well a close examination of the Old Testament reveals that the Lord asked for two types of giving: required tithing and free will offerings.

First, there was tithing that was required. This tithing was three-fold. The first was called the Levites' tithe (Lev. 27:30-33), the second was called the festival tithe (Deut. 12:6-7), and the third one was called the poor tithe (Deut. 14:28). All three of these were demanded like taxation, and were not free will giving to God. . . In addition to that, there was profit sharing on the corners of the fields (Lev. 19), a temple tax (Neh. 10:33), and the Sabbath land rest (Ex. 23). They were giving about twenty-five percent of their income for the funding of that government and for the caring of the land.

Second, there was giving that was voluntary. This voluntary free will giving was a matter of freely giving Him the best, and that's what God's after . . . the choicest things. Exodus 25:1-2 says, "The Lord spoke unto Moses saying, `Speak unto the children of Israel that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart'." This willingness of heart is emphasized over and over again. The beauty of it is that giving in this way provides more than enough. So again we see that required giving was always taxation. Free will giving was always what came out of the willing heart.

- "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of all thine increase." Proverbs 3:9.

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<sup>1</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p.61.

- "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy." 1 Chronicles 29:9.

So is it<sup>2</sup> fair to ask, "Lord do You really expect less of me? Your Holy Spirit lives within me guiding me as I live in the wealthiest society in human history. Do you expect less than You demanded of the poorest Israelite?"

- John Wesley said, "Money never stays with me. It would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find its way into my heart."
- Hudson Taylor said, "The less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become." <sup>3</sup>
- Missionary C.T. Studd said, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

God has given some very timely warnings to us at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in the most wealthy and consumptive society that has ever existed on planet earth. Please turn with me to Ecclesiastes. There are 5 books that constitute the Wisdom Literature of Israel; these books give us some powerful guiding lights for every day living.

- God's Instructions to us on Godly Suffering – Job;
- God's Instructions to us on Godly Worshiping – Psalms;
- God's Instructions to us on Godly Living – Proverbs;
- God's Instructions to us on Godly Planning/Thinking about Life – Ecclesiastes; and
- God's Instructions to us on Godly Loving – Song of Songs.

Please stand with me as I read Ecclesiastes 5.10-15.

As I pondered this passage in Ecclesiastes, the 4<sup>th</sup> Wisdom book, I was deeply struck by a sermon one pastor presented on Ecclesiastes 5.10-15. Here were his<sup>4</sup> points. See if they strike you like they struck me.

1. "Whoever loves money never has money enough" (v. 10). ***The more you have, the more you want.***
2. "Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (v. 10). ***The more you have, the less you're satisfied.***
3. "As goods increase, so do those who consume them" (v.11). ***The more you have, the more people (including the government) will come after it.***

<sup>2</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p.61.

<sup>3</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p.20.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001, p.53-54.

4. "And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?" (v. 11). ***The more you have, the more you realize it does you no good.***
5. "The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep" (v. 12). ***The more you have, the more you have to worry about.***
6. "I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner" (v. 13). ***The more you have, the more you can hurt yourself by holding on to it.***
7. "Or wealth lost through some misfortune" (v.14). ***The more you have, the more you have to lose.***
8. "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand" (v.15). ***The more you have, the more you'll leave behind.***

The next Discipline of Stewardship is Giving. Our key passage for this series is 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4.7. Paul says we are to discipline our selves towards godliness. What encourages a godly life? That is our current study, which I call ***The Disciplines of a Godly Life.***

1. 1<sup>st</sup> we examined ***The Discipline of Scripture.*** Time alone with God in His Word, the Scriptures, is the great necessity of our spiritual lives. We need to be alone with God daily! We need to find times to get away alone. Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. The Lord God of the Universe wants to Arrange your life, and Accompany you trip through life, and authorize everything needed from now on. Wow, that is the best life there is.
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> we examined ***The Discipline of Spirit Filled Living.*** Jesus explained the Holy Spirit in our lives by using the image of a strong river of water flowing out of us. John 7:37-38. John 7:37-39 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and **drink (present active imperative)**. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Rivers of water is the way Jesus describes the normal life of believers, His children.
3. 3<sup>rd</sup> we examined ***The Discipline of Stewardship – First, of LIVING.*** This is the stewardship of our lives, the stewardship of living. A life given back to God, as an offering is what stewardship is all about. Stewardship is not about money it is about life itself. Time and life are far greater treasures than money and possessions. God wants you 1<sup>st</sup>

and foremost! **A GODLY STEWARD KNOWS THAT GOD OWNS HIM AND EVERYTHING HE HAS.** Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. 2 Corinthians 5:15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

4. 4<sup>th</sup> we examine ***The Discipline of Stewardship – Second, of GIVING.*** This is the stewardship of our resources, our possessions, and our finances.

### Biblical Principles For Giving<sup>5</sup>

Giving is essential for a Christian believer. Everywhere Paul went, wherever he founded a church, he taught them to give, because giving is an essential part of Christianity. It is not an option; it is something every Christian must do. Remember the words of Jesus, "**freely you have received, freely give,**" (Matthew 10:8).

Now, if you have not received anything from the Lord, please do not give anything. Keep your money, your resources, and your life to yourself. God does not want it nor should any ministry if God has not moved in your life. But if he has, remember you could not have bought your deliverance for any amount of money. You have received that gift of enrichment, of forgiveness, of healing of your home, or your marriage, or whatever it is, without charge to you. "Freely you have received, freely give."

Now let me ask you, what were Christians living as the New Testament was written, taught about giving?

1. **ORDERED: Giving is commanded, and is not an option.** Paul instructed the Corinthian church, saying **Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders . . . so you must do also** (1 Corinthians 16:1). Also, in 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul directed the command to give in this way: **Let each one of you lay something aside.** Who was supposed to give? **Each one.** Paul wanted all to give. Giving should be individual. Every Christian should be a giver, because God is a giver (John 3:16).

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<sup>5</sup> Much of these materials was quoted and adapted from newsletters from Doug Morrell and David Guzik, Calvary Chapel of Simi Valley.

2. **WEEKLY: Giving is to be regular.** Regarding the collection in Corinth, Paul said that it should be done every week: **On the first day of the week** (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul wanted their giving to be systematic, not haphazard. When they came together for worship and the word, they were commanded to receive an offering.
3. **PREPARED: Giving is to be planned.** Paul wrote, **Lay something aside, storing up** (1 Corinthians 16:2). This has the idea of coming to church with your gift already prepared. This means that you should seek God about your gift at home, and prepare it at home. This causes us to seek the Lord more in our giving, and helps us resist any manipulation to give.

We will cover the other elements next week. But, with all that in our hearts and minds, is it fair to ask,

Lord do You really expect less of me?

Your Holy Spirit lives within me guiding me,

And as I live in the wealthiest society in human history.

***Do you expect less of me than You demanded of the poorest Israelite?***