

LIVING *Generously*

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**WORDS
OF
HOPE**



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Words of Hope's daily devotional is to encourage Christians in the practice of regular Bible study and prayer, in the belief that this discipline helps produce better followers of Jesus. We ought to read and think about the Bible and pray each day not just so that we will feel closer to God or even know more about him, but so that our lives will look more like his did, when he walked among us in the flesh.

The practice of generosity is a case in point. If we study the Bible carefully we will see that Jesus' entire life was an exercise in self-giving, from the moment—before he was even born—when he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Philippians 2:6) to the moment when he bowed his head on the cross and “gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). Anyone who wants to imitate Christ will have to learn how to give.

The devotionals in this booklet are designed to help us do that. They were written by Jeff Munroe, who throughout the course of his ministry, first with Young Life for many years and then at Western Theological Seminary, has encouraged people to give their time, talent, and treasure for the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. Jeff opens the scriptures to us in simple yet thought-provoking ways. Many of the stories and verses he focuses on are familiar and oft-cited texts on the subject of Christian stewardship. But Jeff's take on them is always fresh, contemporary, and personal. I know these devotionals have helped me to look at my own attitude toward money, and to think about what it would mean for me not only to give generously but to live generously. I hope they do the same for you.

— *David Bast*



Day 1

MATTHEW 6:24-34

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

IN WHAT (OR WHOM) DO YOU TRUST?

No one can serve two masters.

On the way to church one Sunday morning, our six-year-old daughter said, “I need some money for the Sunday school offering.” Searching her purse, my wife asked our four-year-old son if he needed money for the offering too.

“Nope,” he said. “They let me come for free.”

Oh, to be four years old!

It’s said the first law of economics is “there is no such thing as a free lunch.” You might not pay for your lunch, but someone always does. The first law of ecclesial economics, then, is “there is no such thing as a free church.” Regardless of whether or not you put any money into the offering plate, someone paid for the lights to be on and a long list of other expenses.

Since church giving is voluntary, the church has a vested interest in people’s giving. The church—along with all its extensions like Words of Hope and Western Theological Seminary (where I work)—has an interest in whether or not you give.

But having confessed that self-interest, I must add that your self-interest is at stake here too. Generous giving is not only in the church’s interest, it is in her members’ interest as well. The Bible is full of verses about the dangers of money for the simple reason that there is no better indication of what you actually believe in and put your trust in than how you relate to money. You cannot serve two masters. In what (or whom) do you trust?



REFLECTION QUESTION

What is your motivation for giving?



Day 2

MATTHEW 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

THE GOD OF ABUNDANCE

And all ate and were filled.

When it comes to how Christians should relate to their money, I'm uncomfortable with the word "stewardship." That may sound surprising, since stewardship is the word Christians use most when talking about money. But I hear "stewardship" being used to justify stinginess. "I'm just trying to be a good steward" is used as an excuse *not* to give instead of a reason *to* give.

That's why I prefer to focus on generosity. Stewardship often begins with the assumption that one is managing a limited and scarce resource. In contrast, generosity begins with the assumption that one is managing an abundant resource. Our God is a God of abundance, not scarcity. The disciples did the math of feeding 5,000 people on two fish and five loaves and felt anxious. Jesus knew there would be twelve baskets left over.

Let me quickly add that I am not proposing some sort of "God wants to make you rich" theology. God doesn't want to make you rich; God wants you to realize how rich you already are. The reality is that the great majority of those reading this devotional are fantastically rich compared with the rest of the world. "Rich" is a relative term, and I find no biblical justification for those who mangle God's Good News into a promise of personal wealth. You already are blessed beyond measure. Let your giving reflect that reality.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are the differences between stewardship and generosity? What do you think about when you hear these words?



Day 3

MATTHEW 25:15-30

. . . to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. . . . After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' . . . Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

DO SOMETHING!

Enter into the joy of your master.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is one of the most often-used stewardship texts. I've heard of pastors who have given members of their congregation amounts of money and a limited time period to see what they can do for the kingdom of God with that money.

But there are problems with reading this parable exclusively as a financial lesson. To begin with, not everyone has the gift (or wants the burden) of making money. On top of that, making this parable solely about money opens it to misinterpretation. Is Jesus advising us to make risky investments? Buy stocks instead of bonds? Gamble?

These readings distort how parables work. For example, when Jesus told the parable of the sower he wasn't really talking about farming. In this case, Jesus isn't really talking about investing. He's talking about life. He's saying do something with what you've been given, do something with the gospel that has been entrusted to you, do something with your life!

If we free this parable from only speaking about money, we see almost limitless possibilities for application. It can speak to topics as diverse as the care of our planet to the care of our most significant relationships. The message of Matthew 25 is much more than "invest wisely." It's live, love, work, and serve in such a way so that when you stand in front of your master one day he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant."



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*How can you apply this parable to your life?
What areas do you need to invest in and develop?*



Day 4

LUKE 16:1-10

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’ And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

WHAT IS MONEY FOR?

Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth.

I pay special attention to every sermon I hear on this text, and without fail the pastor inevitably says, “It’s hard to say exactly what this parable is about.” Challenges arise because on the surface it appears that Jesus is praising dishonesty.

But if we begin with the presupposition that Jesus would not do that, we are left to wonder just what Jesus meant and what sort of “shrewdness” Jesus was praising the manager in this story for. I believe the key to this passage is plainly stated in verse 9: “Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest [other translations use the word ‘worldly’] wealth.”

The question animating this parable is “what is money for?” It has no eternal value, after all. They don’t put luggage racks on hearses and no one pulls a U-Haul to a graveyard. Money is a temporal object, of use only in this world, and according to Jesus it is a tainted object as well. Shrewdness, exhibited by those with “street smarts” like the manager in the parable, comes from understanding how to use money wisely. The wise use of money isn’t in investing it to make more; it’s in investing it to make friends. That makes sense, because right relationships are vastly more important to God than money. Think of how many marriages and business partnerships are ruined over money.

When we use money for building relationships between ourselves and others (and God), we are on a kingdom path.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What is the purpose of money?



Day 5

READ: MARK 12:38-44

As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

THE LAST CENT

*A poor widow came and put in two
small copper coins.*

Context is crucial when interpreting Scripture, and I've included a few verses preceding the story of the widow's offering to help place it into context. Many commentators believe that Jesus was criticizing a corrupt religious system for taking this poor widow's last penny more than praising the widow. How would you feel if you learned a weak and vulnerable relative had given her last cent to a religious charlatan? No wonder he tossed over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple.

Note that Jesus does not praise the widow any more than he discounts the gifts of the rich. He simply asks his disciples to pay attention to the widow (the poor often are invisible) and notice what sacrificial giving looks like.

Context is crucial, and the larger context here is the end of Jesus' life. As Barbara Brown Taylor has suggested, perhaps Jesus wants the disciples to notice the widow because she reminds him of someone. "In four days he will be dead, having uncurled his fingers from around his own offering, to give up the two copper coins of his life" (*The Preaching Life*).

Jesus is teaching that a key question for his followers is not "how much will I give?" but "what will I hold back?" Jesus, like the poor widow, held nothing back. He gave his life as a ransom for many.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is sacrificial giving?

What do you hold back when you give?



Day 6

MARK 10:17-27

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T LET GO

***Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor,
and you will have treasure in heaven;
then come, follow me.***

One of the problems with possessions is that we can become enslaved to them. Think of how differently you behave after putting new carpet in a room. Shoes, pets, food, and drink are suddenly banished. There's nothing wrong with buying new carpet, but do you see how quickly life gets rearranged by the care of just one possession? The more we have to care for, the less space, it seems, is left for God. Caring for his possessions prevented the rich young ruler from following Jesus.

The martyred missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Those words capture the essence of what the rich young ruler failed to understand.

Jesus is not suggesting the rich young ruler can purchase his salvation. Our Lord is showing him that the encumbrance of his wealth stops him from receiving the free gift of God. If he were willing to give up that which he could not keep—his temporal wealth—he could gain that which he could not lose—his salvation. But it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for us to let go of our possessions to create space for God. The ability to do this does not come from inside us. Thanks be to God that through him all things are possible.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In what ways is your life arranged around your possessions? What does your life show about your priorities?



Day 7

MATTHEW 6:19-24

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

SEND IT AHEAD

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.

My wife and I lived in the Netherlands in 2009–2010. When we decided to return to the United States, we did a number of things anyone in our position would have done. We evaluated which of our possessions we would ship across the ocean and which we would sell. After selling our items, we closed our bank account in the Netherlands and transferred all the money to an account in the United States. That money was then converted from euros to dollars. I had no need to “lay up treasures” for myself in the Netherlands. I needed my money in a currency I could use.

What I did was simply common sense, but we don’t have the same forward-looking common sense when it comes to laying up treasures on earth. We can’t buy a better place in heaven with our money. We live like Smaug the dragon in *The Hobbit*, sitting on treasure we can’t use. What use are gold coins and jewels to a dragon? And what use are the riches of this world when we stand before our Maker on judgment day?

In his powerful book *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn says “You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.” We send it ahead by giving it away to causes in line with the values of God’s kingdom. Let’s be eternal investors, who change the currency of this world into something lasting.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What can you send on ahead? What do you think this idea means for your life?



Day 8

DEUTERONOMY 24:19-22

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

LEAVE SOMETHING BEHIND

You shall not go back to get it.

My wife and I have been married for 30 years, and I suppose for any couple to have been married that long requires agreement on most things. Yet there is one area where we constantly disagree: we disagree over the definition of what constitutes a “used up” tube of toothpaste.

I’m the toothpaste scavenger who fishes seemingly empty tubes out of the trash. I twist and bend and squeeze every last bit out. I call this good toothpaste stewardship. My wife has other words for it. She might be right. The toothpaste example is silly, but generosity starts when we let go of something instead of obsessively trying to hold onto it forever.

God told Israel when gathering its crops not to act like me harvesting toothpaste. He told them not to pluck every last grape or shake out every last olive. Instead, they needed to leave something behind for the poor and vulnerable among them.

We ought to be thinking about giving away more than money. I read the other day that Americans throw away 35 million tons of food each year. It’s hard to believe hunger still exists in the face of such excess. Take a look at your pantry or refrigerator. Are you going to eat all that? You don’t need to try and squeeze out every last morsel. Why not give some of it away?



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What gets wasted in your home?

What can you share with other people?



Day 9

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-9 (NLT)

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.

For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.

So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches.

You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.

GIVE LIKE THE MACEDONIANS

They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem.

I once had a wealthy person tell me that two different fundraisers had asked her for money by complaining about people who didn't fulfill pledges they had made. She hadn't felt positive about this and wanted to know if I used a similar tactic.

I do not. I think that approach is fundamentally misguided in several ways. (To begin with, fundraisers should be positive, not negative.) However, I do like Paul's approach here: he encourages the Corinthians to give by citing a positive example.

The Macedonian churches—the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea—were poor and persecuted. They also were joyful and generous. What a great model, not just for the Corinthians but for all churches everywhere. The Macedonians gave beyond their means without being asked—they actually begged for the privilege of giving, instead of waiting to be asked. They were a fundraiser's dream come true. Indeed, if everyone gave like them there would be no need for fundraisers.

Paul refrains from issuing a command to give. He was acutely aware of the Pharisees' sort of giving that Jesus commented on (like in the story of the widow's mite). Their giving had devolved into legalism. Paul wants the Corinthians (and, by extension, us) to discover giving as a joyous and joyful privilege.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Do you see giving as a privilege? Why or why not?



Day 10

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

GRATITUDE AND JOY!

God loves a cheerful giver.

I keep this quote from the theologian Karl Barth on my desk: “Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.” Everything I do as a fundraiser comes from gratitude. Gratitude is the fuel of the fire of giving.

At its heart, giving is a response. Our life, our being, and our salvation all are gifts from God. We respond generously in gratitude.

At least that’s the way it is supposed to work. But I can tell you that some people are givers and others simply are not. Some people don’t give as much as they buy. They offer conditional gifts: “I’ll give you x number of dollars if you will . . .” Sometimes what they want is contrary to a charity’s mission. In those cases the charity should say no to the offer because there are too many strings attached. Most non-profits have “Gift Acceptance Policies” to protect them from their donors!

True givers, those who give out of gratitude, give generously and joyfully without strings. They are the richest people I know. This has been true for ages, as Proverbs 11:24 says: “Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.” The truly generous have discovered the secret of 1 Timothy 6:6, “There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.” True riches are not found in silver or gold but in grateful, joyful, generous hearts.



REFLECTION QUESTION

How can you increase gratitude in your life?



Day 11

LEVITICUS 27:30-33

All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the LORD'S; they are holy to the LORD. If persons wish to redeem any of their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them. All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one that passes under the shepherd's staff, shall be holy to the LORD. Let no one inquire whether it is good or bad, or make substitution for it; if one makes substitution for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy and cannot be redeemed.

THE FLOOR OR THE CEILING?

All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the LORD's.

Tithing was common practice in Israel, commanded here and also commented on in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is mentioned early in the Bible, in the story of Abraham and Melchizedek in Genesis 14. It is a simple, straightforward practice. But by the time of Jesus the extra-biblical rabbinic commentaries had added layers of complexity, and what was once simple became a complicated burden.

What's so hard to understand about 10 percent? Today, Christians ponder questions like "is that net or gross—pre-tax or after taxes?" And, according to several surveys, many Christians do not tithe. Many look at 10 percent as a goal, something to strive for.

I've been blessed to have had several conversations with deeply generous people who look at 10 percent as the floor, not the ceiling. For them the question is not "How much shall I give?" but "What shall I keep?" Their trust is in the Lord, not in their bank balance or investment portfolio.

We make a mistake when we assume that only the wealthy can afford generosity. Would it really be easier to give a million dollars away than a thousand? Tithing takes discipline no matter what your income level—just as prayer, Bible study, and fasting all take discipline. These disciplines are gifts of God to us, for our own good.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*What are your assumptions about tithing?
What areas of your giving need discipline?*



Day 12

MATTHEW 16:24-28

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

THE PRICE OF A SOUL

For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?

There is a devastatingly beautiful scene at the end of the movie *Schindler's List* when Oskar Schindler is racked with guilt for not saving more Jews during the Holocaust. He looks at his wrist-watch, ring, and stickpin and wonders why he kept them, since he could have sold them and bought more people their freedom.

In that moment, Schindler realized that possessions have no value compared to life. There is no way to put a dollar value on life. Similarly, Jesus warns that the pursuit of wealth is useless if you lose your soul in the process. I find it fascinating that Jesus used a financial word here: “profit.” There is no profit in gaining the world and losing God. Even The Beatles understood that, writing these words in one of their final songs, “Last night the wife said, ‘Poor boy, when you’re dead, you don’t take nothing with you but your soul—think!’”

I’ve heard that after John D. Rockefeller (one of the richest men of his time) died, a reporter asked his accountant how much John D. had left behind. “All of it,” the accountant answered.

I met a couple once who had given away 80 percent of their income the year before. (The IRS caps tax deductions at 50 percent.) When asked why they gave so much, they simply said, “Matthew 16:26.”



REFLECTION QUESTION

What is most valuable in your life?



Day 13

LUKE 15:11-24

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. . . . But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

PRODIGAL GIVING

*And get the fatted calf and kill it,
and let us eat and celebrate.*

The word “prodigal” has come to mean wayward, but the root of the word is the same as the word “prodigious.” Prodigal can mean bountiful, abundant, and generous. The story Jesus tells in Luke 15 is really the story of the Prodigal Father, who generously gives and gives.

Here’s a prodigal giving story: a friend was building an orphanage in Haiti. On every visit he was followed by groups of begging children. Even though they moved him to pity, he was told it wouldn’t help the kids to give them money. He was also told not to give them food, since he would need to eat to have the strength to complete his building project.

One particular kid caught his eye and one day my friend decided to bend the rules. He called the boy away from the others and covertly slipped him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. “I can’t save all these kids,” my friend thought, “but I can give one of them a sandwich, and I’m going to do that.” My friend then watched in stunned silence as the boy walked back to the group of his begging friends and broke his sandwich into about 20 small pieces, so that everyone could have a bite.

As I’ve mentioned before, it doesn’t take wealth to be generous. It takes a tender heart. God puts chances for generosity in front of us daily. Let’s be prodigal givers.



REFLECTION QUESTION

*What chances do you see for prodigal giving
in your life?*



Day 14

MARK 14:3-9

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

CONFESSIONS OF A RECOVERING MISER

She has done what she could.

I write these devotionals not only for you but also for me. I am a recovering miser. My kids used to call me “El Cheapo.” Last Christmas, when I did something generous for my family, one of them said, “Who are you, and what have you done with my father?” From one recovering miser to another, here are some ideas on how to become more generous.

- Read the devotional “What Is Money For?” and look for ways to use money to build relationships.
- Get out of debt. Among the many problems with debt is this: it blocks generosity.
- Look for joy. Joy and generosity are intimately joined together. Give where you experience joy.
- Find money to give by substituting something. Take something out of your life—fast food or cable TV or music downloads—for a year and give that money away instead.
- Do what you can. The woman who anointed Jesus is remembered in all four Gospels. One sidelight of her story is that it shows you aren’t going to solve poverty or some other big issue through your giving. Don’t worry about that. Follow her example and give to Jesus extravagantly.
- Choose a kingdom cause and do what you can.



REFLECTION QUESTION

*What can you do to create a joyful spirit
of generosity in your life?*

