

Resources

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Date: 22 October 2023

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Good morning, everybody. How you doing this morning? All right. Close. All right. We'll wake up in a minute and it'll be good times. So, hey, my name is Elliot Lytle. I'm one of the pastors here in New Bern. So good to be with everybody in the room, particularly if this is your first time here. Welcome. And we're excited that you're here with us. But as Kirk said at the beginning, more importantly, with Jesus, the friend of sinners. And so this morning, we're in the middle of a series that thinks about how we can be fruitful in various stages of life and various conditions in which we find ourselves. And at this point, we've talked about friendship and singleness and our bodies and marriage. And today, we're going to talk about how to be fruitful with our resources. Now, resources can mean a lot of different things, right?

So later in the series, we're going to talk a little bit about what that looks like for maybe like your talents and like the spiritual giftings that God has given you. Today, we're going to focus primarily on our money, like our material things, and maybe a little bit on our time. Okay. Now, up front, we probably need to acknowledge that a topic like that, again, way too big to cover in one sermon. The Bible has an exceeding amount to say about what you do with your money to the tune of about 2,300 verses worth. Relax, not doing all that today.

We can't cover all that in one sermon, but Jesus was able to take all 613 laws of the Old Testament and kind of wrap them up, sum them up in the phrase, love God first and love others as yourself. And so while we can't cover everything that scripture has to say, I do think we can get to some of the big ideas the Bible has about what we do with our time and our money, talk about some of the traps we need to avoid, and just think about ways that might actually be helpful to us to be fruitful in these areas of our lives. So I'm sure as we set sail in a sermon like this, there's a burning question in a lot of our minds, which is simply this. Okay, so how much? Like, how much do I need to give? You know, what's going on there? And I promise we'll get to that, but we really can't start there because before you can start to think about the idea of how much of anything you should be given to God, you need to realize that in the Bible, there's this much bigger, more foundational truth you have to grasp first before you can talk about that. And so that's what we're going to do first. The first thing we need to realize in scripture is that God is the owner of everything and we are to steward what he has entrusted to us. Now, honestly, I don't think we have a very good frame of reference anymore for what a steward is. Because, you know, sort of living in our modern American moment, most of our relationships with like our resources have kind of one of two flavors. Either it's you're the owner.

So like you own it, right? You can do whatever you want to with it. You can make whatever decisions you want to. Nobody can tell you anything about it. Or you have this relationship that kind of looks like a renter or a leaser, right? Which means the resources, you have some access to them. There's some things you get to do with it, some decisions you get to make. But there's this very strict kind of contractual framework that binds both what you and the owner can do with it, right? The idea of a steward's a little bit different because indeed a steward is not the owner of something. But that person does have some latitude to manage the owner's account according to their wishes. You have some freedom which comes with both some obligations and some privileges. So maybe kind of take a peek at what that looks like. Let's start with a parable Jesus gives in Matthew chapter 25, talking about what it means to be a steward of your resources, of things in the kingdom. He says this, he says, for it'll be like a man going on a journey who calls his servants and entrusts them with his property.

To the one he gives five talents, to another he gives, or to the one he gives five talents, to another two, to another one each according to his ability. And then he went away. And he who had received five talents at once went and traded with them and he made five more. So also he who had the two talents made two more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received five talents came forward bringing five talents more and said, master, you delivered me five talents. Here, I have five more talents. And his master said, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. Key phrase. And he also had two talents come forward and said, master, you gave me two talents. And here, I have made two talents more. And his master said, well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much.

[5 : 19] Enter into the joy of your master. And he also had received the one talent came forward and said, master, I knew you to be a hard man reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid. So I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here is back what was yours.

And the master answered him and said, you wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I am a man that reaps where I've not sown and gathers where I've not scattered. Yet you did nothing with it. You ought to have invested my money with the bankers. And at my coming, I should have received that which was mine with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to those who has 10 talents. For everyone who has will be given more and he will have an abundance. But from the one who doesn't have, even what he has will be taken away. Now, a few things I think jump off the page in that peril to me. So number one, did you notice that the master entrusted different amounts to different people?

Check. Just like real life. Talents, money, time. The owner has a right to decide how much people get entrusted with. And part of being a steward is accepting that the owner has the right to do that.

But you also see that every servant was given something. So like no matter where you are today in this room, whatever you think you have or you don't have, this parable teaches us that God has absolutely entrusted you with something. And here's something big. That something matters.

Whatever he has entrusted to you matters. It's also interesting to me that in this passage, everyone gets something of value, but the master doesn't give them exact instructions on what to do with it, only to manage it well, according to his wishes. And when he returns, the rewards are not based on how much everybody made. Like the two that get praised, they're equally praised even though one made more than the other. Either one had a more fruitful return. They're praised for their faithfulness, not for how much fruit they bore. And the only one that is punished is done so simply because he doesn't do anything with what's given. Now don't miss this. Like this isn't a verse about that servant not having a high level of financial acumen, right? Like the rebuke isn't, weren't you aware of all the glorious money market accounts you could have invested that in? Like it's not a rebuke because the person doesn't know about finances. It's a picture of God giving you something. Again, think of anything, money, time, talents, that's meant to be a joy to you and a gift to the world. And you bury it in the ground. You do absolutely nothing with it. And so there's a ton we could say about that parable, but to me really the big idea is simply this. God has given you something and you are expected to use that in a way that is fruitful for the kingdom. Stewards get to shepherd and enjoy what's

[8 : 21] God's entrusted to them. But here's the key. They do that without ever making the mistake of believing that they are the owner of what is entrusted. And that's really what the idea of a steward is. And it's really important to grasp that because if we don't, like if we kind of fall into one of the other ideas, then it sets us up for some traps with our resources that can really wreck our ability to use what God has given us. And so trap number one, I think is simply this. It is foolish to build your trust around your resources. Firstly, because you don't get to decide how long you get to use them.

In Luke chapter 12, Jesus tells another parable in verse 16. He said, and he told him this parable, the ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. And he thought to himself, self, what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. And then he said, this is what I'll do.

I'll tear down all my barns and I'll build bigger ones. And then I'll store up my surplus of grain. And then I'll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, you fool. This very night, your life will be demanded from you.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourselves? And this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but is not rich towards God. That's maybe as harsh a rebuke as you'll see in scripture. You fool. Now there are certainly verses in scripture that speak to the wisdom of preparing for the future, right? Like this isn't a verse that says it's unwise to store. It's unwise to have you, you know, it doesn't restrict you from having increase in your financial endeavors. What the heart of this verse is really about is a person that has the arrogance of thinking that they can control tomorrow through their resources. This person stores up treasure for themselves that they're never going to take in. And they can't see that because to them, the only person, the only deciding factor about what I'm going to do with my resources is whatever the whims of my heart are. And God says, you fool. Tonight, those will be required of you.

He just decides not knowing what the master's plan is. You don't get to decide how long you get to use your resources. You also don't get to decide what the fate of them is. In Ecclesiastes, which is a fantastic book, there's this section where King Solomon, so the beginning part of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon is kind of embarking on this quest. He's really interested in examining the things that we typically get meaning from in life and seeing if they can really hold up under the weight of just kind of the fires of the tribulations of this life.

[11 : 29] Can they really hold meaning? And he gets to this idea of like what you've built, your resources, your wealth, your material accomplishments. And he says this in Ecclesiastes 2, I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who comes after me. And who knows whether that man will be wise or a fool. Yet he will be the master of all for which I have toiled and used my wisdom. This is also a vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart over to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun. Because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who didn't toil for it. And this is also vanity and a great evil. He says you can work with wisdom and skill and to build something grand. And then you have to leave it to somebody else who didn't work for it.

You can build something amazing and beautiful and you turn over to somebody and they go and paint polka dots on it. And you don't get any say in that. And if you've worked your life for something, you can see that's a grievous thing to him. You don't get to decide how long you get to use them and you don't even get to decide what happens to them after you're gone. But then I think there's a third trap that props up in scripture that I think in some ways maybe snags us even more than wanting to trust in riches for like luxury or our legacy. And it's simply the idea of we want resources because we want independence. Independence divorced from trusting in God. Now the writ large example of that is we think of people in our society who just like have exceeding wealth, right? Like so much wealth that really there's nothing you can't do, right? Like there's no law you can't get around. There's nothing. You just, if you want out of something, you just buy your way out of something, right? Like if somebody at the, at a business, you know, doesn't bend to your wheel, you're just like, oh, I'll just buy the business, right? Like you kind of get your way, right? But there's probably a smaller version of that that shows up in all our lives, which is we kind of want to work to the place. There's probably some part of us that, and I'll be honest, this is the part that shows up in my heart a lot. Not because like I don't have a bad job. I actually like the leadership I work for and all of that. But I think there's something in all of us that wants to be in a place where if we didn't like what was going on at work, we could just tell our boss to take that job and shove it, right? Like,

I don't need you. Like I've got plenty of money. I don't have to do this, right? But ultimately, it's not our resources that determine that. There's this picture in scripture. It's one of my favorite scenes in all of scripture where Jesus shortly before he's going to the cross is brought before the Roman ruler of that province, Pilate. And Pilate's really just trying to get out of this, right? Like he doesn't like the scenario he finds himself in. He doesn't really want to kill Jesus. He doesn't really want to deal with this. But he's getting increasingly aggravated at the fact that Jesus won't respond in the way he thinks he should respond. And so we reach kind of this critical moment where he's going to have to make a decision of whether to turn Jesus over to be crucified or not.

And Jesus just is not answering him. And he looks at him and basically says, look, don't you know I'm the one that has the power to decide whether you live or die? And Jesus says something that's again, one of the most stark things in scripture. He's been silent for a lot of this. And he looks at this ruler and all of his power and all of his wealth. And he says, you have absolutely no power over me except what is given to you from above.

See, Jesus' trust, like his independence wasn't in his great riches or his great power. He was grounded in the idea that you don't have any power over me that my father doesn't give you, which means he trusted that you may be able to do something to me, but it will not be one inch farther than my father allows you to do it. And that is the same freedom that any follower of Christ is called to walk in. You don't trust in the amount of money you have to be able to tell somebody to walk away. You trust in the fact that your good father and his kingdom is with you at all times. It is foolish to put our trust in our resources. But there's another trap I think that's easy to fall into. And that's this trap number two. It's foolish to try to use your resources to manipulate God. So kind of back to this question at the beginning, how much do I need to give?

[16 : 23] The problem with that question is it often sets us up to approach giving, I think, in kind of the wrong way. Now, don't hear me wrongly here. It is absolutely possible to ask the question, how much does God want me to give? Out of a heart that is just full of faith and kind of truly seeking, like, what is what is discipleship look in practical terms, right? So like, don't feel like that question in and of itself is necessarily a bad thing. The problem is, I think, when we ask that question, a lot of the times what we're actually asking is a different question. And those questions might look something like this. How much do I need to give for God not to be mad at me, to love me? Or how much do I need to give to make sure God's not going to take anything else away? Or how much do I need to give to feel comfortable that I can do what I want with the rest, right? Like, how much do I have to give to

God so that I know that's done and then I know I don't have to think about what God might, like, I can do what I want with the rest of it, right? Or maybe this one, how much do I need to give to God to bring me more blessing? Like, I want to give because I'm just afraid if I don't, he won't give me more increase. And every one of those questions is based in some kind of fear, not in trust of a good father. And ultimately, anywhere in scripture, whether it's with our money or our time or whatever else, if we aren't trusting him in faith, we're trying to manipulate him in some way. Like, we're trying to use that thing to secure his favor, which by the way, he has already given to you if you're his child. I mean, like, how many dishes do your children have to wash before you love them?

All of them? We'll work on that. Feels like that sometimes. And of course, like, doing a chore might very well be something that is important for the growth and the discipline of your children in learning how to be a person that follows the Lord. But the answer is nothing. Like, they come in with your love and your favor. It's not about how many chores they do. Jesus, again, gives a great parable on this. So a lot of us, again, in a church setting, like, we're aware of the verse where Jesus talks about, hey, it's really hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's like, you know, a camel going through an eye of a needle, right? And that's certainly true, right? It's the idea that if you have great wealth, it's really hard to conceptualize what the kingdom is because you've got so much to lose and you're worried about it. But he actually gives a parable on the other side of what a picture of someone who gets it looks like, right? And it's a really short parable. It's a one verse parable. And it's simply this. He says, there's this person and they go out into this field and in the field, they find this treasure. And this treasure is worth more than anything they have ever had in their life and ever will have in their life. And it says, when the person finds that treasure, they go away really excited, ready to buy that field, no matter what the cost is because of the treasure that they found in it. And that's really the picture of the kingdom that God's trying to get us to see. Like if you went out there and you found something in this field that you knew was worth more than all you would ever get, when you go away to buy the field, you don't have any anxiousness about how much it's going to cost you. Because even if it costs you everything you have, you've realized it's worth more than anything I could ever get, right? And so if you have any anxiousness at all, the only anxiousness is I got to buy this field. Like I got to find,

I got to get this done. I got to get what's in that treasure. That's the urgency. And that's the picture that God gives us. Like the more that we understand what you're being given, the more you understand what is available in his kingdom, you stop kind of worrying about the question, what does it cost? Like how much do I have to give? Because you know, whatever I give will not be to be considered versus the treasure I've found. And I'll be honest again, that's, if you honestly don't feel that way, because I get it, like our resources are a tangible thing in this world that we can hold on to. And so maybe you don't feel that way. Like maybe one of the hard things is simply like, I don't, I don't see that or I can't understand it. I think that's just a great place to lean in and ask God for a vision of that, right? Like part of our discipleship is again, asking him, help me to understand what's in your kingdom. Help me to understand what that treasure is so that the anxiety and anxiousness I have about giving away things will start to fade against that picture of the beauty of what you're offering. Because the use of our resources is, isn't just laden with traps.

Like it is full of opportunity to make a difference, a real difference in this world. And one of the ways we do that is simply to sow our resources for kingdom purposes.

[21 : 50] Now the Bible certainly gives you some practical principles all throughout scripture to kind of help guide your giving. You can certainly gain some wisdom from the patterns and requirements of the Old Testament law. Although I would note that the kind of 10% tithe, like the thing you see that comes up in church a lot, again, a good wisdom kind of place to look at what giving might look like. But just FYI, in the Old Testament law, there were actually multiple offerings you were required to give.

That usually probably got you closer to like 22-ish percent of your income. And so that's like a pattern. But more to the point, when you get to the New Testament, after Jesus, over and over, the idea of what we give is seen not so much as this flat percentage as the idea of grace and love that guides it.

And instead of, you know, like a hard in the line thing of like, here's the percentage, you cut out everything. Really, we just get these more broad guidelines, right? But they're really helpful guidelines. So one of them is that we should give consistently and proportionately. So in 1 Corinthians, Paul is trying to help a church, like a fledgling church, figure out what giving might look like. And so in verse 16, he tells them this, on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper. First day of every week, consistently, doesn't mean you have to give on the first day of every week, but it's showing a model of consistency. As he may prosper, right?

So there is an expectation that those who have more would naturally give more consistently and proportionally. We also should give generously and sacrificially. So in another place in 2 Corinthians, he's talking to this church about another church, and he's kind of holding them up as a model of what following Christ and giving looks like. And he says this, he says, for in their severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part, for they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own accord. So the idea generously, probably a little bit further than you feel like you can go, and sacrificially. And Paul goes on in that to say, like, this wasn't so that they would be afflicted and you could be comforted. It's because they were emulating this heart that we're seeking to do. So how much should you give? Like, how much should you give? It's still a question you have to answer. And the only way you're going to know that is to cultivate this daily, living, thriving relationship with God, where you learn more and more how to discern his spirit's voice to you, how to trust his guidance, how to understand his word, how to have the courage to obey his commands. And actually, it's that same way for a lot of things in life. So we've been speaking a lot about money because money is kind of an easy place to conceptualize this and land it, but could really easily apply to your time as well, right? Like, do you see your time as just yours and your families alone? Or is it another resource that is to be shepherded and managed for kingdom purposes? Do you own your time or does someone else? And so you run into questions all throughout life, right? And before I even read them, like, the answer to any of these questions might be yes. Like, the answer might be yes. So you have to, like, think about, okay, I've got a new job opportunity and it's going to offer some more money, right? Maybe even more money that you could give or more money for your family, but it's going to come with some more time obligations, right? Maybe I have to travel more.

Maybe I'm not going to be available for my kids as much. You've got to make a decision about that. That's a resource to be shepherded. When you have children, there's all kinds of decisions you have to make about your time. Do we get involved in these activities? Do we sign up for travel ball? Do we get involved in this hobby over here? And all of that stuff can be useful and helpful for growing your kids and socializing and being a part of the community around you. But every decision you make has a time resource associated with it. Do I engage in this hobby? There's something I really want to learn to do. Do I give my time to that or not? And again, the answer might be yes, but the one thing you can't do is go into that like the foolish man with the barns, assuming that the only deciding factor there is the whims of what you want to do. When you give your time away, you're giving away a resource that can be sowed to kingdom purposes. And you have to bring that before the Father. There is also kind of connected to that, this idea in Scripture that if you sow sparsely, you're going to reap sparsely.

[27 : 03] Now, one of the places I think a lot of churches over time have gone wrong with this is when we're talking about sowing, we're not talking about reaping financially. Like you might sow financially, but the idea isn't you sow, you, um, if you sow sparsely, you won't reap more money.

Like we're not reaping more money. We sow money, time, resources to reap eternal rewards, to reap kingdom things. Like the thing you're sowing into is people coming to know Christ, hearts being mended, families that are broken, people being released from things that are enslaving them. Those are the kind of things you're sowing into. And just simply put, again, if you give less, you're going to reap less. Like that's part of what the kingdom looks like. If you give less and less of your time, then the harvest will be smaller. And again, how do you know how much you give?

Daily, vibrant relationship with Jesus. You need to grow in discernment and wisdom. You need the clear teachings of Scripture and the subtle promptings of the Holy Spirit. And lastly, you need one other thing I think, which is we need to emulate the heart of Christ. So we love rags to riches stories.

And I would actually say rightly so. There is a gospel thread to that, right? The princess or the, the peasant becomes a princess. The walk on makes the big play in the big game, right? The guy that's just been struggling for years and years and caught a million bad breaks and can't make anything work finally breaks through to the business of his dreams and prosperity. There is a gospel thread to that.

But the really interesting thing is the one we follow, the one called Jesus, is actually the opposite. He is a riches to rags story. He is someone who deliberately gives it away so that others can be rich. Says that very plainly, pretty much word for word in 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9. It says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. Jesus left the riches of heaven, the power of heaven, to be born into poverty. And not only was he born in it, he died in it. The heart of Christ is never, you kind of see that in scripture, it's never go and be well fed. It is a love that steps into the mud with people. It descends from glory. It sacrifices. He was hung on a tree, embarrassingly, naked, in pain, in agony, on a cross. And that is the same heart we are called to emulate. Because when we do that, that's part of how the world gets a picture of who Christ is. We emulate the heart of Christ with our resources. And when we do that, we not only draw near to him, but we show a picture to a watching world around us of what that Savior did and how much he loves him. Let that be in our lives, Lord Jesus. As the band comes up.

[30 : 44] So if you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, I know that when we talk about the use of resources, particularly in money, in a church setting, it can feel like a bit of a setup, right? Like the church needs money. You're trying to, it's like a grift, right? Like here it comes. Your religious organization needs to get money. And I would hope that if nothing else this morning, you would see that, that God does care about what you do with your resources, but not because he needs your money. He cares because he cares about your heart. He cares about the fate of your life. And the one that we follow, the one called Jesus, he left nothing on the table. He poured out all of it, that others might be rich. And us followers of Jesus, like we don't always get that right, but he went the whole way. He was brought low so that we could be lifted up. And if any part of that speaks to your heart, man, we would love to talk with you about that, what it looks like to follow that person and why we do it. If you're here and you're a believer, I hope you've been encouraged today to emulate that heart of Christ. Maybe to even be a little excited about the idea that, that again, God hasn't forgotten the things you've given. He says, store up treasures in a place where moth and rust, where they can't be taken away. Like there is joy.

You enter into the master's joy. Like it's not just this servant servile thing. He's inviting you into what that looks like. Maybe you would need to rejoice in that. Maybe you have realized that you are treating all of your resources as just yours. Or maybe you've realized that those traps, you are kind of subtly falling into them. Well, that's why we gather. To repent and to agree with God on what we should be doing. Today's a great day to do that. Jesus would welcome you into that. To change your mind about how you use your resources. Today's a great day to start. Let's go ahead and stand together.