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Growing in Giving
Mark 10:17-27

¹⁷ As Jesus 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?**” ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ 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.’” ²⁰ He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, **loved him** and said, “**You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money^[e] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.**” ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away **grieving**, for he had **many** possessions.

²³ 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!” ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is^[d] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ **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.**” ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another,^[e] “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “**For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.**”

Most of us don't consider ourselves rich, right?

And yet, Americans are literally the **wealthiest people** on the planet.

America controls 29 percent of the world's wealth...with only 4.2 percent of the world's population! <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/all-of-the-worlds-wealth-in-one-visualization/>; <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population/>

The World Bank says that half of the world's population lives on less than \$5.50/day, and 1 billion live on less than \$1/day. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/17/nearly-half-the-world-lives-on-less-than-550-a-day>

The average American spends over \$100 per day!

<https://www.sunmark.org/connect/sunmark-360/heres-how-much-average-american-spends-day-how-do-you-measure>

By far, most of the people in the world do not own a car. But 24% of American families own three or more cars. <https://policyadvice.net/insurance/insights/how-many-americans-own-cars/>

We enjoy so much, while billions of people in the world lack sanitation, clean water, electricity, and education. We are truly blessed.

We are the *wealthiest* nation on earth,
but we are also *in debt*.

Most Americans owe over \$6,000 on credit cards not to mention loans and cars and homes.

Some people are living above their means,

But most people are just trying to get by.

We rely upon credit for gas and groceries, and medical bills.

Just making more money doesn't necessarily solve the problem.

Higher-income people can get higher credit limits,

And it can become a vicious cycle.

So, we've got *riches*, and we've got *money troubles*.

And Jesus says it's easier for a *camel* to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person like us to enter the kingdom of heaven!!!

So, what can we do?

This man, someone just like us, walked away from following Jesus---
All because of his *money*.

But, what if this story is not about how much we have or don't have,
But about *what HAS US*.

Not what we hold, but *how tightly we HOLD it*....

Where is our HEART when we think about riches or money troubles?

Is our heart full of *pride* for what we've earned,

Or are we *grateful* for the gifts of God?

Are we feeling self-sufficient in our riches,

Or *God-sufficient*, because it all comes from God's provision?

What do we do with our riches, and our money troubles?

How do we trust God for what we need,

And learn to tell the *difference* between a need and a want?

And how do we turn our hearts to God, instead of ourselves?

This young man who approached Jesus, was very focused on himself,

And what he could do to get eternal life,
 He was also focused entirely on his wealth.
His possessions possessed him!

Rev. Dr. Wiley Stephens tells a story about focusing on ourselves, and our stuff.
 A trusting abbot was impressed by the spiritual progress of a young disciple.
 The abbot let the disciple live in his own lean-to down by the river.
 Each night he would wash his one ***robe*** and put it out to dry.
 One morning he discovered that the ***rats*** had torn his robe to shreds.
 He begged for another from a nearby village, and the rats destroyed that one.
 So, he got a ***cat***, but then he had to beg for milk for the cat.
 So, he got a ***cow***; but of course that meant he needed hay.
 He got the ***hay*** from the fields around his hut.
 But then he needed ***workers*** to help.
 Soon he was the ***wealthiest man*** in the region.
 Several years later, the abbot comes back to find a ***mansion*** instead of a hut.
 He asks the monk ***‘what is the meaning of all this?’***
“Oh Holy Abbot, there was no other way to keep my robes.”

The ***more we focus on us***,
 the further we move away from God and God’s work in the world.
 Soon, all of our self-serving actions ***prevent us from serving anyone else***.
 Rev. Dr. Wiley Stephens, *Sticker Shock for the Soul*, Day 1, 2012.

The rich man who approached Jesus.
 He was ***all about himself***.
 He walked away from a life that could have been transformed with meaning and
 joy, even in the midst of suffering and hardship.

You know, ***Jesus had a lot to say*** about our money.
 Jesus knew that even if we don’t “love” money,
 we get pulled in by its ***power***.
 We have the temptation to see our ***wants as NEEDS***,
 And to keep ***‘needing’ more***, like the monk and his robes.

Jesus knew the stress of having to make money ***stretch***.
 Remember he was an itinerant preacher,
 He and his disciples relied upon the generosity of others just to live.

Jesus actually talked about money *more than any other* topic besides the kingdom of God—
almost *1 out of 10 verses* in the gospels have something to do with money!

So, if we take *Jesus' teaching seriously* in other areas,
Don't we need to do the same with his words about money?
I mean, deep down we all know that money can be like
a *chain* around our hearts, right?
Whether we have plenty, or we feel like we're drowning,
Money can weigh us down!

So, what if Jesus tells us how to *avoid that trap*?
What if he has the way to be free from the power of money?
And it all boils down to one word:
GIVE.

What if GIVING is our *path to freedom*
And the way *out of temptation...*
What if it's the way to find *contentment...and gratitude...and joy?*

What if giving is *God's answer* to all money troubles?
It makes sense.
God is the *greatest giver*,
And we are called to follow God.

Giving is *as old as creation*, when God showered humanity with gifts.
And God's people responded in kind.
Abraham gave a tenth of what he had to honor God.
Moses and the Israelites were asked by God to bring the first fruits of their harvest to God in the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 26).
In biblical times *a tithe, or a tenth* of whatever one had was expected to be set aside, first thing, and from the very best, to support God's work, and those in need.

The *prophets* all told God's people to give—
It was not optional to support the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the poor.

Jesus spoke constantly about the *need to give*.
He said '*do not store up treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven*' (Matt 6)
'*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*'...

'from those whom much has been given, much will be required' (Luke 12:48)
'Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, your life does not consist of the abundance of possessions' (Luke 12:15).

This man who wanted to inherit eternal life,
 Jesus didn't tell him to give away his riches because we're all supposed to give everything away.

Jesus told him he **LACKED one thing**—
 In other words, his wealth meant so much to him,
 That the only way to find freedom was to give it away.

What if Jesus' words are not just for the **rich**,
 And not just if we have money to **spare**.
 And definitely not once we have our finances in **order**....

What if Jesus words are **FOR all of US? Today?**
Regardless of what you have or don't have?

Remember the story of a **widow who put** two small coins
 into the temple offering?
 Jesus said it meant more than all the rich people's offerings put together,
 because she gave **sacrificially**, a true offering.

What if that's key?
 We give, that which **means something**,
 Not what's left over.
 Because giving to God is **WORSHIP—it's an offering** to God.

Giving to God is **not fundraising**,
 And it's **not an optional part of growing** in our faith,
 It's foundational.
 And transformational.

I can't even tell you what it means for Ed and I to set aside at the first of the month, tithes to God—it has blessed us more than we could ever imagine.
 We never even think about what that money could be used for—
 because we know it's being used for good by God.

So, is Jesus saying we have to give all of our money away? No.
Is Jesus saying money is bad, so give it away? No.

Jesus does NOT say that money is evil, neither does the Bible.
 1 Timothy 6:10 says: **For the LOVE of money is the root of all evil**

Jesus condemns that---our *love* of money, our *trust* in it,
 our *reliance* upon money instead of God.
 And he says that there's a path to freedom—**GIVE**.

When we think about our own giving,
 the truth is **our need to GIVE is far greater**
 than the church's need to RECEIVE. (*let me say that again*)

We should be responsible
 To help the church do God's work in the world, and that takes money.
 The *saints who went before us at this church*---
 their generosity made it possible for us to even be here today!
 We are called to follow in their footsteps.

But Jesus didn't teach stewardship to balance budgets,
 It's to **help us GROW in faith!**

Even if the church had millions we would still need to give.
 We give, because God is a giver, and we follow God!

Giving is about **gratitude**,
 And **dependence** on God.

Winston Churchill once wisely said,
We make a LIVING by what we GET. We make a LIFE by what we GIVE.
 Jesus talks about this again and again.

So the question is-- **what kind of life** do we want?
Do we want the giving life?
The life of freedom? Of joy?

Or, do we want **to let money have power** over us?

When Jesus says that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than
 for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven,
 You know what he says right after that?
"For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

That's the thing---we get the strength and power to give—from God.
God is the one who opens our hearts and our wallets,
 God is the one who shows us the power and the JOY of giving.

And there is so much ***JOY in giving!***
 There is JOY when we ***invest in the kingdom*** of God!

I want you to think about when you have given to God—
 Think about how it feels to give, knowing you are making a difference!
 Jesus said ***it is more blessed to give than to receive*** (Acts 20:35)—
 Have you ever found that to be true? I know I have!

Giving changes lives.
 Giving to a church enables missions and ***ministries--***
 When we give money--
 It makes a world of difference—in ***our lives, and the lives of other people.***

So today, I want us to think about ***WHY we give to God.***
 What does it ***mean*** to you,
 What does it ***bring*** you?
 How does it ***change*** you?

Why do YOU give to God?
 I want you to write that answer on that little paper heart.

When the offering plate comes by, as you drop in your gifts,
drop in that heart,
because that's really what we're REALLY doing when we give to God.
 We're giving our hearts.

We'll hang these on a board in the narthex,
 to encourage one another in our giving in the next two weeks.
Your reason for giving might be the very thing
 that ***inspires*** someone else to give generously!

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** for us today:
 Our God is a giver, so we are too.
 The path to freedom, to joy, to peace...it's all found when we Give.
 And for that all God's people can say together, Amen.