

Study Guide

Series: How Will You Measure Your Life?
“By How and What You Give”

Monday - Matthew 20:1-15. In Jesus’ startling story, some workers agreed to work all day for a typical day’s wage. Others joined in at various points during the day, including some who started just an hour before quitting time. The master paid them all the same, which led the all-day workers to grumble. Then Jesus said that the master (God) asked pointedly, “Are you resentful because I’m generous?” Does the master’s way of paying the workers in this story feel unfair to you? “It was not unfair, of course. No one was underpaid; it was just that some received ‘unreasonable’ generosity. That is what the kingdom of heaven is like.” (*New Bible Commentary*) In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul said Christ was treated as we deserved so that we would be treated as he deserved. In what ways does that “unfair” exchange draw your heart toward Christ? Salvation, eternal life with God, is a greater gift than we could possibly earn. Yet sometimes are we tempted to think “service time” should give us extra privileges, or rank us above “newbies”. How long have you served God? Do you generously accept newcomers to God’s Kingdom as Jesus did?

Tuesday - Matthew 25:14-28. Three servants—two called “good and faithful,” the third fired for being “wicked and lazy.” A “*talanta*” was a lot of money—up to 20 years of a typical worker’s wages. But in Jesus’ story, the servant with two *talantas* was as faithful as the one with five. Jesus said our faithfulness to God shows in our willingness to use whatever resources of energy, time, skills, money or other assets God gives us to bless others and build God’s kingdom. What resources has God placed in your life? How are you using those resources to serve the Kingdom of God and bless others? Are there any resources you have “buried in a hole in the ground,” so to speak? If so, how can you begin to use them actively for God’s purposes? The apostle Paul wrote that “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). To the Galatians, he wrote that living selfishly destroys our freedom, and that serving each other in love is the divine antidote for selfishness (cf. Galatians 5:13-14). In what ways have you seen the Spirit work through your commitments to God and others to grow the fruit of generosity in you?

Wednesday - Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Proverbs 11:23-28. In defending Mary, who generously anointed his feet with costly perfume before his death, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 15:11 (cf. John 12:4-8). His words have at times been misused to justify an uncaring spirit toward the poor—an impossible meaning, when we read their full setting in Deuteronomy 15. The sages who compiled the Proverbs closely linked generosity with righteousness, praising those who trust in God’s values and share generously with people in need. Following God, means valuing and admiring God’s qualities, and wanting to have them yourself (cf. Matthew 5:48). When we serve a generous God, it makes sense that we will want to grow in our own practice of generosity. Have you ever felt (in the words of Deuteronomy 15) “hard-hearted” or “tight fisted” toward poor people, and “resented” giving to help them? In what ways is God helping you feel better about “opening your hand generously” to “the needy among you”? Israel’s Proverbs were descriptions of how life usually works, not promises that God will always force things to happen in a certain way. To which traits did this set of proverbs assign the highest value? The lowest value? Which parts of these proverbs will come true in eternity, even if they don’t always happen

in this world? How closely do the values you live by each day fit with the values Israel's sages taught?

Thursday - Luke 16:10-15. Israel, in Jesus' day, had a few extremely rich people, and lots who were very poor. Jesus' message in today's reading was clear, and it was controversial. Jesus challenged the values of the religious leaders who were among the rich, saying it is impossible to serve God and wealth. Those who saw all their wealth as a sign of God's favor sneered. Jesus replied, "What is highly valued by people is deeply offensive to God." Scholar N.T. Wright wrote of this passage, "Money is not a possession, it's a trust: God entrusts property to people and expects it to be used to his glory and the welfare of his children, not for private glory or glamour." *The Message* said the religious leaders thought Jesus was "hopelessly out of touch." Does Jesus' teaching about worldly wealth and true riches seem "out of touch" to you? Does it challenge you? Does it inspire you? Jesus didn't say we "shouldn't" serve both God and money; he said we "cannot" do that. Our hearts can only have one ultimate master. The Greek word translated "money" meant all types of material goods. When you face ethical choices or career decisions, what determines your course: God's values, or the material and social payoffs you expect?

Friday - Luke 12:13-21. Jesus stated a basic principle of his kingdom in verse 15: "One's life isn't determined by one's possessions." He followed up with a parable. It was a simple story – a rich man, reaping a large crop, thought of nothing but how to keep it all, adding it to his already abundant supply. Absorbed with earthly wealth, he forgot that, when life ended, none of it would be of any use to him. Jesus knew better, and urged his hearers to become "rich toward God." Scholar William Barclay said this rich farmer made two crucial errors. First, "he never saw beyond this world." For a Christian, mortality is no longer something to fear (cf. Hebrews 2:14-15)—but it is a reality to take seriously. In what ways are you planning and living for the time when this world's material possessions will no longer matter? The farmer's second error, Barclay said, was that "he never saw beyond himself." In contrast, he cited Methodism's founder John Wesley: "At Oxford he had an income of 30 British pounds a year. He lived on 28 British pounds, and gave 2 away. When his income went up to 60 pounds, 90 pounds and 120 pounds a year, he still lived on 28 and gave the rest away." In what practical ways do you look beyond yourself when you evaluate and make changes to your standard of living?