

Lesson Three: The Symbolism of Giving - "Why Money Matters"
For May 7, 2017, First Baptist, Lewisville, by Generis
(All Scripture references are New International Version unless otherwise stated.)

What's in a Gift? Read the following story about Farmer Jones.

The country preacher visited Farmer Jones. "Farmer Jones," the preacher said, "if you had two mules, would you give one of them to the Lord?" "Oh, yes," said Farmer Jones, "if I only had two mules, I'd surely be happy to give one to the Lord." "Well, Farmer Jones," asked the preacher, "if you had two cows would you give one of them to the Lord?" "Oh, yes, preacher, if I had two cows I'd give one to the Lord," answered Farmer Jones. "Well, Farmer Jones," said the preacher, "if you had two pigs, would you give one to the Lord?" Farmer Jones paused a moment before responding, "Now, preacher, that ain't fair. You know I got two pigs!" Emphasize that each of us have the opportunity to give to God. Remind class members that the first recorded account of an offering for God is found in Genesis 4:1-6. Read the passage aloud. Ask: What made Abel's offering acceptable while Cain's was not? State that the offering is a pure act of worship. Stress that this session will provide answers to the following questions:

- What possible significance could our gifts have to God?
- What determines a gift's value to God?
- Why has God included the act of giving as an important part of the Christian lifestyle?
- What relationship exists between the gift and the giver?

The Symbolism of the Gift

Write the following statements on the whiteboard: "The gift represents the giver," and "The gift that does not touch the giver does not touch God." Instruct class members to listen for how David showed that he not only agreed with these statements but lived them out in his life as well. Read 2 Samuel 24:18-25. Ask: Was there anything in God's command that specifically told David that he could not accept Araunah's gift? After several have responded, ask: What do each of these statements mean? What implications does each have toward our giving to God? How did David demonstrate these in his own actions? Why was it important to David to "not offer to God that which costs me nothing?" Emphasize that David's life demonstrated that "the gift that does not touch the giver does not touch God."

My Money and Me

Call on a volunteer to read Matthew 6:21 aloud.

Ask: As an employee, how do you give yourself to your company? Record responses on the whiteboard. Responses should include: giving of our time, energy, physical abilities, and mental abilities.

Ask: What do you receive in return? (Possible responses can include: a paycheck, financial stability, personal independence, positive self-esteem.) Stress that "your paycheck in very real terms is you, at least part of you." Briefly explain my money is me and how we spend our money is how we spend our lives from the student material. Emphasize that our financial expenditures demonstrate our personal and family priorities.

Call on another volunteer to read Luke 22:19-20 aloud.

Ask: How did Jesus put himself "in" the observance of the Lord's Supper? How do we put ourselves "in" our gifts to God?

The Value of the Gift

Read Mark 12:41-44 aloud. Instruct class members to try to picture the scene as you read the following description: One artist has pictured the widow as a beautiful young woman with a serene peace and purity in her face. Her face seems to have a soft, radiant glow to it. Her left arm and hand are concealed beneath her dull brown robes. Her right arm is extended forward and raised chest-high. In the palm of her small hand rest two little coins. In stark contrast to the widow are several male worshipers who stand behind her. Their garments, obviously of great value, are rich in colors of gold, green, red, and purple. Symbols of their religious devotion dangle from their robes. In their hands they clutch tightly their bulging coin purses and chains of gold. Their eyes hold obvious displeasure at the widow's worthless contribution. Their faces are etched with pride, arrogance, selfishness, and greed. Remind class members that Jesus stopped to see the people bring their offerings to God.

Ask: What did Jesus see? What do the words "all she had to live on" communicate about the widow? What is giving "out of their abundance?" Can gifts given out of abundance matter to God? Who offered the more valuable gift? How did the widow put herself "in" her gift? The Value of the gift is determined by its value to the giver: State that the Scriptures provide another example of a selfless giver.

Read Mark 14:3-9. Explain the financial worth of the gift and the significance of the woman's dowry. Ask: What impressed Jesus about the gift? What was Mary's motivation for such an expression of worship? Stress that the dowry was of value to Mary because it contained her future well-being. Explain that without the dowry, Mary's chance at marriage, a husband, and a family were gone. Mary's gift was important because the gift was an expression of all that was important to her. Some Gifts Defile God's Altar:

Divide class members into small groups of two or three and distribute index cards on which you have written one of the following phrases: defiled food, blind animals for sacrifice. Duplicate as needed. Each group will only receive one of the phrases. Explain that, as we saw with Cain's offering, not all offerings are acceptable to God. Instruct each group to read Malachi 1:6-8 and "Some Gifts Defile God's Altar" in the student material to determine what made their assigned phrase unacceptable to God. After several minutes, call for responses. Emphasize how adept the Jews had become in giving to God that which was of no value.

Ask: Through their actions, did the Jews "show contempt" for God's name? Why? A New View of Giving: Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-16 aloud. Call on a class member to read the paraphrase found in "Giving as a Gift" in the student material.

Ask: What realization did David have about his relationship with God? How did the people demonstrate their generosity before God?

Read the following true story: A man in North Carolina wanted to help his church by giving a significant amount of money. He wanted to help, but he didn't have the money. His savings account was small, and his salary just paid the bills. However, the man had one possession that was worth a lot of money. He had spent twenty years rebuilding a boat. Although the boat was bought originally in serious disrepair, twenty years of hard work and expenses had brought about the boat's original beauty. The boat had given the man much joy over those years. He was proud of the boat and what he had accomplished with it. He sold the boat for \$30,000 and gave the money to the church. Ask: The boat was worth \$30,000 in money. What was it worth to the man who had worked on it and loved it over those years? What was it worth to God? How was the man "in" his gift to God?

Distribute a copy of the following Meditation Moments or read it aloud and encourage class members respond silently to each question.

Meditation Moments:

1. Have I appreciated the offering as the first and purest expression of worship?
2. Do I see myself as being in my offering?
3. Is my giving a true expression of my life, labor, and love, or is it a token?
4. Do I understand that the true gift's value is not found in dollars and cents, but in its value to me?
5. Could I benefit from a thoughtful examination of the relationship between my heart and my treasure?
6. Have I understood that where I put my money is where I put my life?
7. Have I given to God only those things I will never miss?
8. Have I found ways to give to God that which cost me nothing?
9. Have I said, "Thank you, Lord" for His gift of giving?

Read the following prayer in closing:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I have undervalued the significance of my gifts to You. Forgive me for thinking You were more interested in my money than in me. Often have I given out of habit, routine, or obligation with no spirit of worship. Too often I have given from my abundance, being careful never to inconvenience myself financially. I have allowed my selfishness to lead me to present offerings to You that cost me nothing. Help me, Lord, to be honest with myself and correctly discern my own heart. As I "remember" the Lord Jesus in the cup and bread, help me to remember that "I" must be in the offering. Show me ways to give from my life as well as from my bank account. Let me never be satisfied with offering You only my money. Guide me to understand more clearly and apply more fully the rich realities of the significance and symbolism of giving. Thank You for giving me a way to give myself to You again, and again, and again . . . Amen