

The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn (Excerpt)

The Money Connection

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matthew 13:44).

The parable of hidden treasure is one of many references Jesus made to money and possessions. In fact, 15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic — more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.

Why did Jesus put such an emphasis on money and possessions?

Because there’s a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money. We may try to divorce our faith and our finances, but God sees them as inseparable. Our approach to money isn’t just important — it’s central to our spiritual lives.

The poor widow steps off the pages of Scripture by giving two small coins. Jesus praised her: “She, out of her poverty, put in everything” (Mark 12:44).

In stark contrast, Jesus spoke of a rich man who spent all his wealth on himself. He planned to tear down his barns and build larger ones, storing up for himself so he could retire early and take life easy.

But God called him a fool, saying, “This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Luke 12:20).

The greatest indictment against him — and the proof of his spiritual condition — is that he was rich toward himself, but not rich toward God.

The traveler made short-term sacrifices to obtain a long-term reward. “It cost him everything he owned,” you might lament. Yes, but it gained him everything that mattered (Matthew 13:44).

Confession: I affirm God’s full ownership of me (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and everything entrusted to me (Psalm 24:1). I am His money manager.

Thunder, Lightning, and Grace

The Macedonian Christians understood the joy of giving: “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Corinthians 8:2).

The Macedonians refused to let hard circumstances keep them from joy: “They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in the service to the saints” (v. 4). They had to plead, presumably because Paul and others were telling them that their poverty exempted them from giving.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8: “We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.”

How was God’s grace demonstrated?
By their act of giving to needy Christians.

In verse 6, Paul calls the Macedonians’ giving to help the hungry in Jerusalem “act of grace.” The same Greek word is used for Christian giving as for God’s grace.

Christ’s grace defines, motivates, and puts in perspective our giving: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (v. 9).

Our giving is a reflexive response to the grace of God in our lives. It doesn’t come out of our altruism or philanthropy – it comes out of the transforming work of Christ in us. God’s grace is the action; our giving is the reaction. We give because He first gave to us. The greatest passage on giving in all Scripture ends not with “Congratulations for your generosity,” but “Thanks be to God for his indescribably gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

As thunder follows lightning, giving follows grace. When God’s grace touches you, you can’t help but respond with generous giving. And as the Macedonians knew, giving is simply the overflow of joy.

Prayer: Father, give me more grace, so that I will be able to give to your kingdom. In Jesus name.

Eternal Rewards

God grants us rewards for generous giving: “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21).

Jesus is keeping track of our smallest acts of kindness: “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42).

God is keeping a record of all we do for Him, including our giving: “A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name” (Malachi 3:16).

Imagine a scribe in heaven recording each of your gifts on that scroll. The bike you gave to the neighbor kid, the books to prisoners, the monthly checks to the church, missionaries, and pregnancy center — all are being chronicled. Scrolls are made to be read. I look forward to hearing your giving stories and meeting those touched by what you gave.

Jesus said, “If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” (Luke 16:11-12). If you handle His money faithfully, Christ will give you true riches — eternal ones.

By clinging to what isn’t ours, we forego the opportunity to be granted ownership in heaven. But by generously distributing God’s property on earth, we will become property owners in heaven!

Prayer: Father, help me to continue to lay my treasures at your feet. Give me grace not to be weary in well doing in Jesus name. Amen.

Roadblocks to Giving

We know that Christ commands us to give. And we know He offers us great rewards for giving. So why is it so hard to give?

I’m convinced that the greatest deterrent to giving is this: the illusion that earth is our home. But Heaven, not earth, is my home.

The Bible says we’re pilgrims, strangers, aliens on earth (Hebrews 11:13). We are ambassadors representing our true country (2 Corinthians 5:20). “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20). We’re citizens of “a better country — a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:16).

Where we choose to store our treasures depends largely on where we think our home is.

Suppose your home is France and you’re visiting America for three months, living in a hotel. You’re told that you can’t bring anything back to France on your flight home. But you can earn money and mail deposits to your bank in France.

Would you fill your hotel room with expensive furniture and wall hangings? Of course not. You’d spend only what you needed on the temporary

residence, sending your treasures ahead so they'd be waiting for you when you got home.

If we let this reality sink in, it would change forever change the way we think and live. We would stop laying up treasures in our earthly hotel rooms and stand sending more ahead to our true home.

Prayer: Father, thank you for preparing a place in heaven. Help me to always remember that heaven, not earth, is my home. In Jesus name.

Share Your Giving Stories

It's increasingly common for Christians to ask one another the tough questions: How is your marriage? Have you been spending time in the Word? How are you doing in terms of sexual purity? Have you been sharing your faith? But how often do we ask, "How much are you giving to the Lord?" or "Have you been robbing God?" or "Are you winning the battle against materialism?"

When it comes to giving, churches operate under a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. We lack communication, accountability, and modeling. It's as if we have an unspoken agreement: "I won't talk about it if you won't, so we can go right on living as we are."

Think about it. How does a young Christian in the church learn to give? Where can he go to see what giving looks like in the life of a believer captivated by Christ? Why are we surprised when, seeing no other example, he takes his cues from a materialistic society?

We're to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24). Shouldn't we also be asking how we can spur one another on toward giving?

Some may object, "But we don't want to compare each other's giving." Paul tells the Corinthians of the Macedonians' giving, saying he's making a comparison to motivate them (2 Corinthians 8:7-8).

Scripture tells us not to give in order to be seen by men (Matthew 6:1). Certainly we should be careful to avoid pride. But Jesus also said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). Through an unfortunate misinterpretation of biblical teaching, we have hidden giving under a basket. As a result we are not teaching Christians to give. And they're lacking joy and purpose because of it. Unless we learn how to humbly tell each other our giving stories, our churches will not learn to give.