

Pointers, Part 7 (Final)
The Way we View and Distribute Money
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Today we are wrapping up this sermon series entitled “Pointers” which asked the question, “How do our lives point to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord?” If someone was really trying to figure out what our lives are all about, if they watched how we interact with our children, if they listened to the words we say, if they saw the people we hung out with the most, if they followed us around and clocked what we do with our time, if they heard how we prayed, and observed how we serve our church family would they know without a doubt that Jesus Christ was the One we honor over and above all others? Could they tell how grateful we are that Jesus has saved us from being slaves to sin on earth and saved for us a place in Heaven, and that He holds the final authority in our lives as our Lord? For the most part these things can and should be seen and heard in our lives if we are true disciples of Jesus. How are our lives pointing to Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, so that others could look at our lives and be directed to him as the source of all that we want and hope to be? It’s much more than being a good person or a nice person. Non-Christians can be good and nice by their own choice. But followers of Jesus Christ exhibit so much more, especially in times of pressure, in times of trial and trouble. Disciples of Jesus Christ are consistently exhibiting qualities that reflect the character of Jesus Christ. As I said in week 4 of the series, we want our lives to make Jesus Christ plain as day for all who have been given eyes to see.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, I pray now that the words you’ve given me to speak would glorify you, would make your Word clear, would help us all love you more and desire to follow you in every way, every day. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Today, as we wrap up the series, we are going to look at what God’s Word teaches us about how to view money, about how to view the use of money as a way of pointing to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord. This is the one ‘pointer’ that is not naturally observable in our personal lives. For most of us, the way we view the use of money, the way that we spend money is a private event. No one outside the household is usually looking over our shoulders when we balance our checkbooks, shop at Target, or order things online. But that doesn’t mean as disciples of Jesus Christ that we are not accountable. How we live our lives 24/7, knowing that our Heavenly Father, knows and sees is of utmost importance. As his children, we want to please Him. We don’t want to disappoint Him. We want to please Him (not to get something), but as a way of honoring Him for all He has done for us.

So, (holding up a \$20 bill), do you view this as money to be spent on something or do you view it as God’s provision? Do you see this primarily as something you can pay a bill with, buy groceries with, buy a shirt with – or do you see it as God’s provision for you to use as His Word directs? What does the word **provision** mean?

noun

- 1.the action of providing or supplying something for use: synonyms: *supplying, supply, providing, furnishing, equipping, giving, allocation, distribution*
- 2.an amount or thing supplied or provided: synonyms: *facilities, services, resources, solution, assistance, offerings, allowances, opportunities*

verb

- 1.supply with food, drink, or equipment, especially for a journey.
- 2.set aside an amount in an organization's accounts for a known liability.

Now, let’s look at Psalm 24:1a, “*The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.*” If you believe the Bible is true, which as a congregation is our first core value, “*We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and the absolute Truth,*” then that verse unquestionably means that God himself is the one

who provisions us with provisions for this journey called life. In fact, *“the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it”* means that ONLY God gives us what we need because God himself is the Distribution Warehouse. Now, I’m not saying that the specific couch you sit on or the specific TV you watch, or the specific phone in your pocket came directly from God’s warehouse. I’m saying that the means to purchase it, the money you used to buy these things came directly from God’s hand – because the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. So, let me ask the question again about this \$20 bill. Do you view this as money to be spent on something or do you view it as God’s provision? If you view it as God’s provision, then doesn’t it make perfect sense that we follow His lead in how we distribute it?

Let’s read God’s Word. First, Luke 12:13-21, *“¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ ¹⁴But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’ ¹⁵And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”*

What does it mean to be rich toward God? I think it means to count God as your riches, not what you eat, drink, wear, live in, drive, where you vacation, or what you carry around in your pocket or your bank account. And the awesome thing is that anyone can be rich toward God whether we have many barns and acres or whether we have a rented one-room apartment with a car that has 250,000 miles on it. All of us, as recipients and distributors of God’s provision, can be used mightily by God to produce spiritual fruit for God’s eternal kingdom!

Perhaps it might help to read that same passage from The Message. *“¹³Someone out of the crowd said, ‘Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance.’ ¹⁴He replied, ‘Mister, what makes you think it’s any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?’ ¹⁵Speaking to the people, he went on, ‘Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.’ ¹⁶⁻¹⁹Then he told them this story: ‘The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: ‘What can I do? My barn isn’t big enough for this harvest.’ Then he said, ‘Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll gather in all my grain and goods, and I’ll say to myself, Self, you’ve done well! You’ve got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!’ ²⁰“Just then God showed up and said, ‘Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?’ ²¹“That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.”*

Let’s take a look at another Scripture in 1 Timothy 6:6-10; 17-19, *“⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. . . . ¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”*

And one more from Luke 12:32-34, *“³²So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. ³³“Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. ³⁴Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”*

God's Word tells us, bottom line, that having money to pay our bills and take care of our needs and yes, obtain some of our wants as well is not a bad thing. Money, by itself, is not a bad thing. It is the love of money, it is the heart and the mind that can barely think of anything else except when I can go get this, or get that, or is constantly thinking about how to make more money (because no amount of money will ever be enough) that pulls us away from the view that money is God's provision for his people to distribute in the way he knows we can make the biggest impact for the kingdom.

Back in August I received an email from Ben Raber, Director of NETwork Ministries in Chambersburg. This time Ben was not sharing a need about NETwork, this time he was sharing a personal need about someone who used to work with NETwork with whom John and I had a long-term relationship. He was asking for help for a young woman who, nearly 15 years ago, stepped out on a very large limb to help someone who ended up leaving her alone on the limb. Our friend had co-signed a school loan for someone she was trying to help find her way in life, and our friend ended up with the debt of that college loan for a person who walked away from her responsibility. Over the last 10-12 years, only a few people knew that our single friend was trying desperately to follow God's call on her life, working in low-paying ministry settings, meeting her own financial responsibilities, and paying the debt that had been laid on her. Our friend had been accepted into the master's program of The Allender Center in Seattle, WA. The mission of The Allender Center (a subsidiary of The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology) is to foster redemption and healing in individuals, couples, and communities by helping them tell their stories with awareness and integrity while also training leaders and professionals to engage the stories of others with courage, artistry, and care. In fulfilling this mission, they are committed to:

- Boldly engaging the impact of trauma and abuse on the human heart,
- Providing healing and teaching to individuals, couples, and communities, and
- Training professionals to listen and enter into stories in a way that facilitates the transformation and hope of the gospel.

What a beautiful ministry to a broken world! Anyone who knew our friend, knew this was a perfect match for her, thus the email from Ben Raber to all who knew and loved our friend. God had laid it on his heart to try to pay off this school debt for our friend as a surprise gift to her before she left for The Allender Center. The goal was to raise the balance: \$27,500. That's a lot of money ... and in order to present her with the gift before leaving, there were only 5 days to do it.

John and I received the email, read the facts, looked at each other, spoke about an amount, wrote a check, and delivered it the same day. Apparently, many other people did the same thing. In 5 days, \$30,600 was raised to free our friend from a debt she was quietly trying to pay because she was so too embarrassed to ask for help, feeling it was her own fault she had co-signed the note.

From our human perspective we say, "\$27,500 – that's a lot of money!" But when God is the holder of all things, when God is the Great Provider, no amount is too big or too insignificant for Him to pass through his people to the ones in great need. The key is to find the right people. The key is to find people who are truly disciples of Jesus, who don't view money as a means to their end, but as a means to God's end!


Our friend wrote a letter to those who gave, and here are her words, *"The attached photo was taken just a few blocks from my school's waterfront location on my first day of orientation, a day I never thought would be my reality on account of the debt I had once carried. The sailboat represents to me my journey of following Jesus' leading like sails follow the wind. I have felt numerous times God's confirmation that He has called me to be here in this place, in this space, at this school, and in this chapter, and I have all of you to thank for **carrying my burden** that weighed me down for so long, thus **fulfilling the law of Christ**. Together. Friends, to one whose pride, shame, identity and self-reliant crutches have made receiving even small gifts difficult, your act of extravagant love has so graciously forced me to receive with open arms and heart, casting all my vices aside. I am keeping them open in a posture of receiving, as we are to live with our Father, the giver of all good things. I don't know to what sacrificial extent your*

giving was for each of you, but I know that God is proudly and joyfully celebrating the “foolish” giving of His children, at the wonder of your love for me, and the breaking of chains your love did in my life.”

Why share this from someone you don't even know? Because of the picture it provides for us, friends. It is a picture of people all over the world who are burdened by a consuming focus on money, whether it is because they don't have enough or because they are addicted to having more than anyone else. It is a picture of people who are freed from a consuming focus on money and who are 'at the ready' to give and to serve as God directs to help lift the burden of this life through the faithful living out of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We love because He first loved us. We are careful not to get into so much debt that we aren't free to give quickly and generously as he has given to us. We are careful to meet our own responsibilities. We are aware of what is filling our barns – self or God. And we are obedient to God's Word that tells us to give back to God 10% of the 100% he gives to us! This is God's way of helping us remember that “The earth is the Lord's and everything in it!”

This past week we had a ministerium meeting. Pastor Wayne Hall, pastor of Dry Run Church of the Brethren, who has been battling cancer for about a year now, was with us in our meeting. He is still taking chemo, but the cancer is now in remission. Praise God! Pastor Wayne said that some people have said to him, “Aren't you angry at God for making you go through this?” And with tears in his eyes, Wayne told us how he replies. “God doesn't owe Wayne Hall anything. He's already given me everything I need by giving his only Son Jesus to die for me.”

When that's where our hearts are, the way we raise our children & youth, the way we invest and manage our time, the words we say and don't say, the friends & marriage partner we choose, the way we pray, the ways that we serve our church family, and the way we view and distribute the money God provides for us should point clearly, consistently, and boldly to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord! To God be the glory forever and ever, Amen.



CARRY EACH
OTHER'S
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FULFILL
THE LAW OF
CHRIST.
GALATIANS

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