

God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between
the material and the spiritual

Chapter 20



with
Mitch
Anthony

IN THIS CHAPTER

THE SIZE OF YOUR HEART

God is not after your money; he is after your heart. Gracious giving involves not only the act of helping others, but also having the right heart toward ourselves, our resources, and others.



THE SIZE OF YOUR HEART MEANS MORE THAN THE SIZE OF YOUR GIFT

“As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on’”

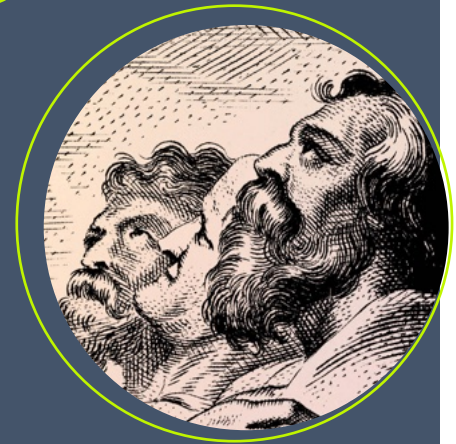
– Luke 21:1-4, NIV

The treasurer will always measure the size of the gift, but the Lord measures the size of the heart. How much heart did this particular gift require? Offering a thirsty man a drink out of my faucet is plenty different than giving away my last ration of water on a blistering summer day. All gifts are not given with a giving heart. In a conversation with a woman who works with extremely wealthy philanthropists, I commended the generosity of some of these people. Her response startled me, “Generosity has little to do with it.” She continued, “To truly be generous you would have to need what you’re giving away. The numbers these people give away may seem large to you and I, but for many of them it’s nothing but the froth coming off the top. They don’t feel it at all. In fact, the majority are doing it for social reasons more than for charitable reasons.”

Her words strike right to the heart of what Jesus is referring to in this real-time, public illustration. He is confronting charitable giving with the question, “Am I giving out of my need or out of my need to be recognized?” A subsequent question is, “Do I give because I should or because it is the pulse of my heart to feel for others and do what I can to help?” There is a vast difference between the motivations of obligation and compassion.

We all know someone like the woman Jesus was observing—a mother, an aunt or uncle, a grandmother—who simply lives to bless others. These individuals don’t make themselves out to be martyrs when they do something for others. but rather radiate a sheer and translucent joy when given the opportunity to bless someone else. They live to give. They possess giving hearts. The Almighty animates through these people a manifestation of what his love is all about. I

THERE IS A VAST
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE
MOTIVATIONS OF
OBLIGATION AND
COMPASSION.



have a daughter with just such a soul, and she has become an object lesson to me on the natural impulse and inclination of generosity.

Years ago I found a purse that she had misplaced and had been missing for quite some time. The purse contained her babysitting and allowance earnings. There was around \$200 in it—quite a sum for a 14-year-old. Wanting to use the serendipitous find as a money-management lesson, I sat down with Sophia and suggested making a plan of what she wanted to do with the money.

She started by peeling out \$90 and said, “I’d like to send this much to the flood victims. Now how much do I have left?”

With that first portion I had anticipated her saying, “to save in the bank” or “to spend on clothes.” I smiled and answered, “A little over half is what you have left.”

That act of charity was so effortless for her—instinctual and without hesitation. The gesture was unimpeded by the fears and cynical rationale we adults learn to excuse our apathy. She surmised that there was nothing she needed as badly as the flood victims needed. I was taken aback by the amount calculated by nothing but heart. I had expected her to mention something in the 10-20 percent range for giving—but not 45 percent. I inquired further as to her designs on the remaining balance, “Do you want to save any?”

“Yeah,” she responded, “How about I save half of what is left and spend the other half?”

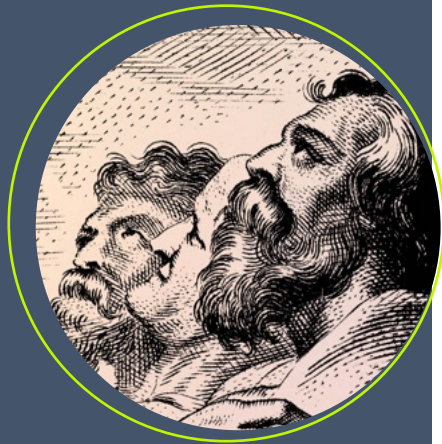
Her spending plan was one that flowed organically from a giving heart—one that had not yet learned to cling to money. I also loved the order of her approach to managing money: give, save, spend.

Observing Sophia’s generous inclination, I sensed that if we, as parents, nurture a giving heart in our children, greed has very little opening to enter into their lives. The joy of a giving heart so radically transcends the transitory thrills of self-consumption that it becomes a letdown to over-indulge on oneself. Generosity is the great buzz of the true life—and the greater the sacrifice, the greater the buzz.

Enough For Me

For three decades I have lived in Rochester, Minnesota, which is home to the famed Mayo Clinic—a base for some of the best and

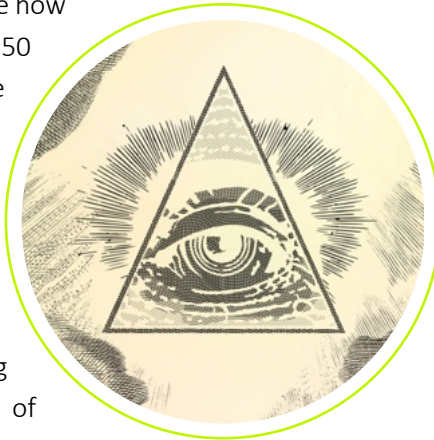
IF WE, AS PARENTS,
NURTURE A GIVING
HEART IN OUR
CHILDREN, GREED
HAS VERY LITTLE
OPENING TO ENTER
INTO THEIR LIVES.



brightest physicians and surgeons in the world. When I first moved here, my pastor told me of his admiration of a parishioner in our church who at that time was regarded as the top-rated surgeon in the world in his particular discipline. The pastor shared with me how deeply involved this man was in reaching out to the needy and the world community. He shared a remarkable fact with me, that annually this man gave away 90 percent of his income. Here was a man, the absolute best at what he did in all the world, possessing the potential to earn millions annually in private practice, but opting instead for the pay scale offered at the Mayo Clinic—and then giving 90 percent of that portion away.

At that time, I was just getting started and living in what some call a “starter neighborhood.” The physician lived just a few blocks away in the same neighborhood. I drove a five-year old car. He drove one slightly older. I remember how humbled I felt by this extraordinary example of how a person can choose to live. What would the world be like if more adopted such a strategy? What level of influence would be brought to bear upon our culture if more of us set an example in that general direction?

Boldergiving.org is a cause that encourages the idea of radical generosity, challenging wealthy individuals to give away 90 percent and live on the rest. For those who are not ready to take the radical 90 percent plunge, they demonstrate how to live well while giving away 50 percent. They share stories of people who have done it. These stories are inspiring and radically liberating. I encourage you to visit the site and read the stories.



The testimonies of people who made a radical decision regarding money reveal how money let go of them when they let go of it. One of the steps that this group encourages people to take is to calculate their surplus. How do people know what they are capable of giving if they do not know their surplus?

Our lives in North America (even if we are not prospering at the moment) are replete with surplus. Yet we are exhorted by the investment industry to act and think as if we are always just a hop and a skip away from pushing a shopping cart through the streets. Consider that fact that most of us not only have filled garages and closets but also many stuffed storage facilities—and are paying monthly to store things we don’t use. We all have some degree of surplus.

OUR LIVES IN
NORTH AMERICA
ARE REplete
WITH SURPLUS.



The idea of calculating our surplus is a noble one. The “pulse” of the giving heart is in asking, “What do I possess that I do not need as badly as someone else might need it?”

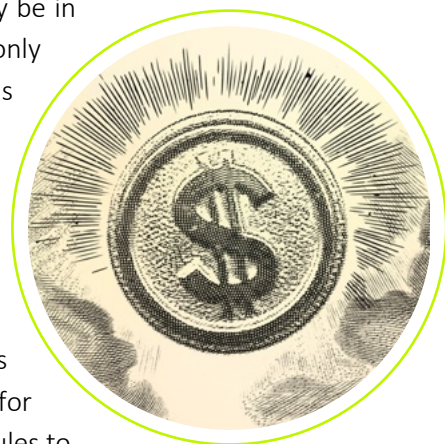
Bear in mind, however, that this question does not yet get to the core of what Jesus characterized as real generosity. I am only asking about what we do not need or do not use. I am only exercising “marginal generosity” when I give away my surpluses. It is when I give away that which I may need later on that I am truly living out generosity. When I see a need and say to myself, “This need is more important now than whatever need I am saving for in the future”—that is the voice of a giving heart. That is when true liberation from money’s grip takes place. It lets go when we let go.

A giving heart is a distributing heart. A heart first gathers blood and then keeps it moving. This movement—known as a pulse—is what keeps us alive, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. In the intersection of our spiritual lives and our money, faith provides this flow. The replenishing Source we believe in helps us understand our responsibility as stewards, which is to maintain a giving pulse, to constantly distribute. This gives our spiritual lives vitality.

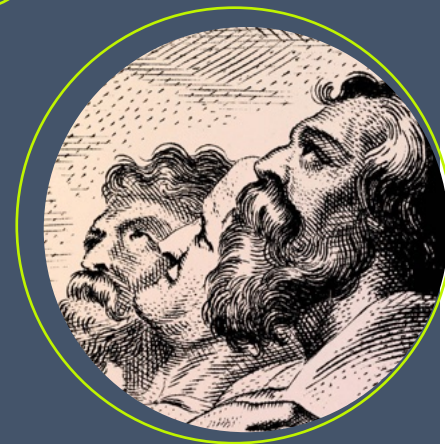
The bacteria of money anxiety and anxious gathering permeating our culture cannot grow in flowing water but does so easily in the gathering pond. The messages about never having enough are abundant, but ironically, so are the messages about spending to satisfy some inner need for importance and significance. We are torn between messages to spend to be somebody and to save to avoid being a nobody later in life. If you and I decide to be a person that lives to give, we will clearly be in the minority. The world not only needs your giving heart, it needs your daily example of what generosity means.

Rules of the Heart

Jesus is clearly more concerned about the state of our hearts than about any particular rules for giving. It doesn’t take long for rules to become heartless obligations. In ancient days, the tithe was introduced as a guideline for giving. Bring the first fruits of your harvest—ten percent—to God. This guideline, however, soon evolved into a litigious rule imbuing the giver with a religious sense of superiority and self-vindication. Jesus commented on this when he addressed the leaders who were responsible for teaching the people about giving:



THE WORLD NOT
ONLY NEEDS
YOUR GIVING
HEART, IT NEEDS
YOUR DAILY
EXAMPLE.

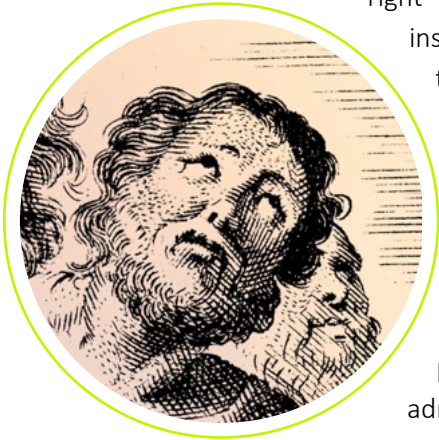


"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."

– Matthew 23:23-24, NIV

These leaders became rote and self-aggrandizing givers, having lost sight of what a giving heart is really about. A giving heart is intent on helping right wrongs, relieving suffering, and taking care of those who cannot care for themselves. How often has this phenomenon surfaced in our religious institutions today? We can easily find religious quarters where people are obsessive about their particular religious rules of conduct while seemingly oblivious to suffering

right under their elevated noses. Jesus insistently points back to the state of the heart and underscores pure motives for giving. Pretenses of religiosity, no matter how big the check in the offering plate, simply don't make the cut in his eyes. Though Jesus declared that the religious leaders should have practiced the latter (tithing), he admonished them for not being motivated from the heart in the process.



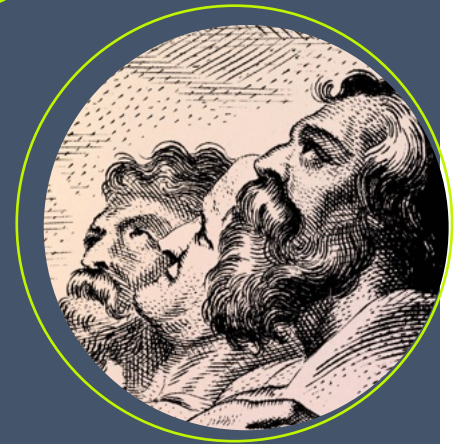
A Determining Heart

"But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of 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...for if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little'"

– 1 Cor. 8:7, 9, 12-15, NIV

JESUS
INSISTENTLY
POINTS BACK TO
THE STATE OF
THE HEART
WHEN GIVING.



According to Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, God has an agenda for developing a generous heart, and that agenda comes with the presentation of real needs—requiring heartfelt response. This agenda also includes the reality that we belong to a larger community; one that cannot function properly unless we recognize our position within it. If those with surplus constantly raise their obligation to the level of their resources, they fail to see their role in the community.

Some would read the above verse and say it sounds like socialism, which is exactly what we are confronted with. The Almighty presents an ethos regarding money that is a voluntary form of socialism. It is not a mandatory form of disbursement, but a system of participation based on grace.

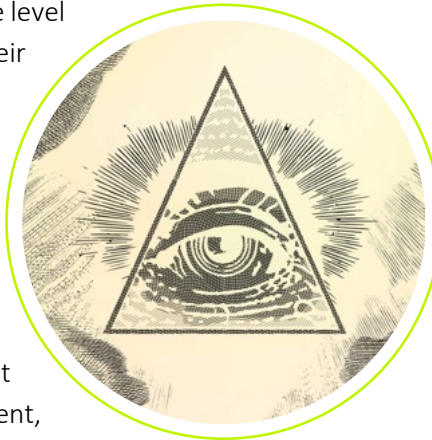
From God's point of view, the gift isn't right if the heart isn't right. We are instructed to attend first to the state of our heart, and then attend to what we can or cannot do to help at this time. We are being asked to see to it that we "excel in this grace of giving." Once we inspect the state of our heart, opportunities will present themselves to prove us as givers.

Christ-like Empathy—Recognizing Need

"When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

*I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'*

Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'



GIVING IS A
SYSTEM OF
PARTICIPATION
BASED ON GRACE.



Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—

*I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,
I was sick and in prison, and you never visited.'*

Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?' He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.' Then those 'goats' will be herded to their eternal doom, but the 'sheep' to their eternal reward"

— Matthew 25:31-46, MSG

If we take Jesus at face value, we cannot escape the reality that we will be judged based on our receptivity to need and our willingness to indulge ourselves toward those needs. Were the needs below us? Did we sympathize and engage in Christ-like empathy and let a giving heart guide us? To the sheep he says, you gave, you gave, you gave. And to the goats, you saw and you gave not, you saw again and again and you gave not. In God's final analysis, being aware of a need is not enough. Being involved is what matters.

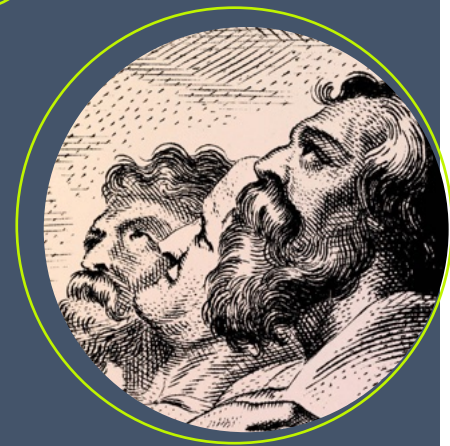
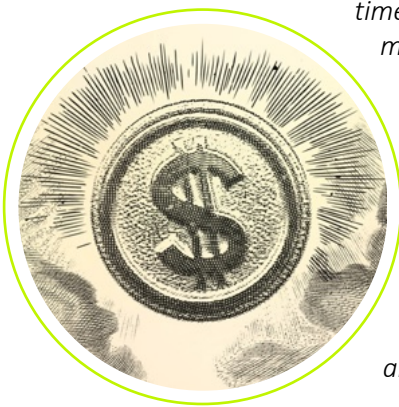
More to Give

What you and I have to distribute is not the primary point. Having our heart in the right place is primary; keeping our eyes open to need is secondary; possessing substance to give is tertiary. God is not concerned with the amount. He is concerned with you and I being in rhythm with his outflow to others.

"Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving. God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, ...He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon"

— 2 Corinthians 9:6-9, MSG

GOD IS
CONCERNED
WITH YOU AND I
BEING IN
RHYTHM WITH
HIS OUTFLOW TO
OTHERS.



"We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give."

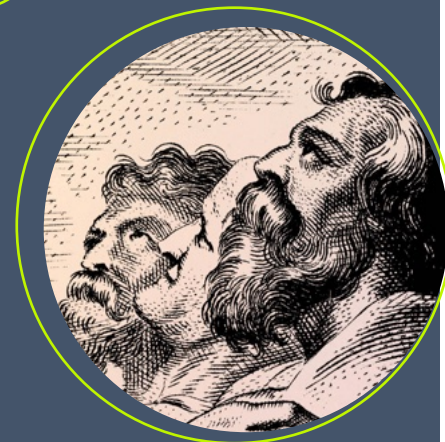
– Winston Churchill

We are in a dangerous place when we become consumed with our own troubles and needs and no longer care to see the needs of others. Being in want is no excuse for selfishness, just as prosperity is no excuse for excessive self-indulgence. Jesus' convert, Paul, comments about a group of people who also had great troubles but found it in their hearts to help those in even more dire straits:

"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will"

– 2 Corinthians 8:2-5, NIV

These individuals had reached a place where the needs of others transcended—almost erasing the consciousness—of their own needs. Like the woman who gave two mites, they became mindless of their own abject state, so inspired were they with the desire to help others. God rejoices in such a heart and makes sure that this person, ahead of all others, is taken care of...because they are critical to his distribution plan. Their hearts are one with God.



BEING IN WANT IS
NO EXCUSE FOR
SELFISHNESS.