



### MAIN POINT

Money can be a touchy subject in the church despite the fact that every single person makes financial decisions every single day. As taboo as the subject of money might be to us, it was not to Jesus. In this series, we want to discover why money matters so much to God and why it should matter to us. What we should see, beginning today, is the way we treat our money is a window into the state of our hearts.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

**In a general sense, how comfortable are you with having discussions around the subject of money? Why?**

**What is your earliest memory of money? Was it saving to buy something? Getting a gift? Working for an allowance?**

**How do you think your upbringing has influenced your current attitude toward money?**

Whether we recognize it or not, money is more than just currency; it's a spiritual issue. In fact, it's so much of a spiritual issue that Jesus talked more about it in His three years of ministry than faith, prayer, heaven, and hell combined. But God is not after our money; He's after our hearts. If we want to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, then let's examine our finances because the way we treat our money is a clear window into the state of our hearts.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**> READ LUKE 18:18-25.**

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**Imagine this scene. What do you think was happening in the heart of the rich young ruler that caused him to approach Jesus like this?**

**Does Jesus' response surprise you? Why or why not?**

**Why do you think Jesus told the rich young ruler to do something rather than to believe something?**

**What does that indicate about the nature of money in relation to our hearts?**

Jesus' response to the rich young ruler doesn't mean that we become right with God through selling our things; rather, Jesus looked deep into the heart of the young man and saw that the primary obstacle to his love for God was his love of money. Jesus taught about the relationship between our heart and money in Matthew 6.

> READ MATTHEW 6:19-24.

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**How does this teaching from Jesus emphasize His action point to the rich, young ruler?**

**Why do you think the way we treat our money is a window to our hearts? How does the way we spend our money reveal what we truly value?**

We might make great claims about our devotion to God, but money doesn't lie. We will spend according to our hearts. The primary indicator of the ownership of our hearts, according to Jesus, isn't how much we read our Bibles. It's not how much we serve. It's money and the way we treat it.

**Look back at the account of the rich, young ruler. Why, then, did Jesus say that it's so hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God? Conversely, why would it be easier in a sense for the poor to enter the kingdom?**

If, as Jesus said, money is the primary competitor for ownership of our hearts, then those without money have fewer obstacles to overcome in following Jesus. When Jesus told the rich, young ruler to sell his possessions, He was asking Him to abandon the thing He loved and treasured the most in order to follow Jesus.

**What are some ways we might try and justify having both of these masters at the same time?**

**Think about someone whose walk with God you respect. How does the way they treat their money reveal what they value and believe?**

It's an either/or proposition for Jesus. You can either serve God or serve money, but never both. Either God or money is going to own your heart. The story of Zaccheus in Luke 19 demonstrates what happens to a person's treatment of money when they truly fall in love with Jesus.

> READ LUKE 19:1-10.

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**What similarities do you see between the rich, young ruler and Zaccheus?**

## GROUP GUIDE

**How does this story serve as an example of what happens to a person financially when God owns their heart?**

Zaccheus wasn't made right because he gave away his stuff; he gave away his stuff because his affections were recentered on God. When God owns the heart, the way we treat our money will reveal it.

### APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Is Jesus' view on money any different than yours currently is? How?**

**What are some ways you can bring your thinking about money in line with Jesus' teaching about your heart?**

**Do you need to talk with anyone close to you about the way you are treating your money? How can we pray for you in having that conversation?**

### PRAYER

Pray that you would see money in its proper light—as a window to what you love and treasure. Pray that God would be chief in your affections knowing that your money will follow your heart.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **How have you seen your perspective on money begin to change this week?**
  - **Have you engaged with any specific spending pattern as a heart issue yet?**
- The challenge to memorize Matthew 6:21.

**LUKE 18:18-25**

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**18:18.** A Jewish civil administrator interrupted Jesus with a question. The question centers on the divisive point between the two leading groups of Jews, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Sadducees, using only the first five books of the Old Testament, found in these books no reference to resurrection, so they denied that resurrection of the dead was possible. Pharisees, following all three parts of the Jewish canon—Law, Prophets, and Writings—saw definite proof of resurrection in Daniel 12:2 and many other references, particularly in the Psalms and Isaiah. Was this administrator trying to get Jesus to take sides, or was he searching for certain hope in his own life? Luke does not give us his motivation, just the question. This man called Jesus “good teacher.” This represents a common politeness of speech and recognition to some degree of Jesus’ role as an intelligent, caring teacher.

**18:19-20.** Jesus caught the man’s attention by challenging his description of Jesus as good. Only one person can be truly good. That is God. Thus, unknowingly, the administrator had linked Jesus to God. Jesus caught the link and brought it out into the open. He repeated traditional Jewish theology in confessing that God alone is good. In so doing, Jesus did not affirm or deny His own claim to deity. Luke expected his readers, however, to see the link that Jesus made and to affirm the obvious—that Jesus, being good, was also God. Jesus turned to the source of authority that all Jews accepted—the Law, the Torah of Moses. He quoted part of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

**18:21.** The man with the question also had a personal testimony. He had rigorously obeyed all the commandments since youth. We must not quibble with his answer at this point and try to point out that all have sinned. Here the issue is obedience and eternal life. This Jew apparently thought on the criteria of his religion that he deserved eternal life, but internally he felt something missing.

**18:22-23.** Jesus had the answer. He returned to the theme that He had addressed so often—wealth and dedication. Do you trust possessions more than you trust God? Are you trying to put your trust in both possessions and God at the same time? Can you live without your possessions but cannot live without your God? Sell your possessions and find out (see 6:45; 12:13-21, 33; 16:13). These words cut to the quick. Jesus had found the man’s weak spot.

**18:24.** Jesus spoke in the form of lamentation, much as a deep sigh would be used at a funeral to express grief at personal loss. The sad truth is that the rich have a hard time giving up their trust in their possessions. They cannot take the long-term look and realize that one day they will lose control over wealth. Then they will be robbed of eternal treasure, too. No wonder Jesus issued His sad lament: How hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. They have never experienced the need to trust someone or some thing outside their own intelligence and wealth.

**18:25.** Jesus turned to hyperbole to make a point. A hyperbole is an exaggerated statement or figure of speech not to be taken literally. To make a point, Jesus used this hyperbolic statement to illustrate the impossibility of a large animal, such as a camel, going through a very small opening, the eye of a needle. Attempts to understand this saying as involving a camel going through a small city gate (no evidence exists of a gate named Eye of the Needle) or as a mistranslation (camel as a mistranslation of the word cable) lose sight of the hyperbolic nature of Jesus’ words. There is a rabbinic analogy that speaks of an elephant going through the eye of a needle, which is an example of the hyperbolic nature of Jesus’ saying in verse 25. Jesus’ point was to describe the utterly impossible. The lure of wealth overpowers the lure of the kingdom, not just in this rich Jewish administrator’s life, but in the lives of virtually all rich people and many who are not quite so rich. Thus, the first step to the kingdom is not to solve the problem of putting a camel through a needle’s eye. The first step is to get rid of the burden of riches so a person has nothing to trust but Jesus.

**MATTHEW 6:19-24**

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**6:19-21.** Verses 19 and 20 are almost exact parallels, designed for easy understanding and easy memorization. This is a critical passage. Here the King drew an ultimate contrast between on earth and in heaven. He urged His followers to forget earth and think of heaven. Jesus was summarizing why the kingdom servant is motivated to practice righteous acts. It is not for temporary honor among men on earth, but for eternal reward before the Father in heaven. The point of this life is preparation for the world to come. The present tense verb here can best be translated, “Stop storing up treasures on earth!” But Jesus does specifically command us to store up for yourself in heaven. Moths were universally known as a destructive force (Job 4:19; Isa. 50:9; 51:8). Burglary was especially common in the day of mud-brick homes. Break is the Greek term meaning “break through.” It literally means “dig through.” There is no permanence in this world. You cannot take your treasure with you into the next world, but you can send it on ahead through kingdom-oriented stewardship.

Jesus not only saw nothing wrong with His followers working for reward; He went so far as to command it. The New Testament clearly encourages it (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 9:24-27). Jesus' words in the last few verses of the Bible emphasize it: "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). This concept of storing up heavenly treasure by doing good works was common in rabbinic tradition, and so it would have been easily understood by Jesus' audience and Matthew's readers. The conditional "if" statements of 6:22b-23a are parallel, again using the form of poetic wisdom literature.

**6:22-23.** These two verses can be confusing until we look at them in the light of the preceding and following context. We have not departed from the theme of the person's attitude toward material wealth. Jesus spoke of a small part of the body as being very important to the body as a whole, much as James claimed that anyone who could tame his tongue could tame his whole body (Jas. 3:1-12). No muscle of the body can relax if the eye is uncomfortable. Both Jesus and James were speaking of the inner human control over one's attitude toward wealth and one's choice of words. These two limited aspects of human choice can have profound consequences for the entire person (the whole body, figuratively speaking). In keeping with the figurative language, the light would be an accurate perspective on the value of material wealth, while darkness would be some warped distortion of this truth. The person with a generous eye can see clearly, and life can be guided in wisdom and safety by such light. The person with a covetous, selfish eye is walking in darkness and is bound for harm he cannot see. Poor perspective causes stumbling.

**6:24.** The center of this verse is, again, a symmetrical parallel pair of statements, poetically memorable. The term Money is from the Aramaic *mamon*, meaning "wealth" or "property." It is anything in which a person places confidence. Jesus carefully chose here the picture of a slave. There could be no doubt about the issue of control. No person can serve two masters.

## LUKE 19:1-10

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**19:1-4.** Reaching Jericho, Jesus continued his journey up the dangerous hills toward Jerusalem. Interruption came before he could leave the city. A short, clever tax collector was determined to see Jesus. As an administrator for the Roman government's tax office, Zacchaeus had amassed great wealth, overcharging the Jewish people and taking a cut from the taxes gathered by other tax collectors whose work he administered. His wealth could not provide the one thing he wanted more than anything else. Unable to see over or get through the massive crowd swarming around Jesus, Zacchaeus noted the direction Jesus was taking, ran ahead, found a tree, and climbed.

**19:5.** The clever tax collector did get a view of Jesus, and Jesus spotted him up in the tree. Jesus even invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus's house. Jesus said it was necessary for him to visit Zacchaeus—apparently a necessity initiated by God to show one more time Jesus' central mission on earth.

**19:6-7.** Overjoyed at this unexpected privilege, the short man scurried down the tree. This time he had no trouble getting through the crowd to Jesus. But as they let the tax collector through, the crowd must have complained. How can Jesus eat and fellowship with such a traitor? Jesus showed he was an "equal opportunity" diner with traitors. Earlier he had eaten at the home of Pharisees and showed how they were traitors to God's intentions for the Jews. Now he ate with a person whom the Jews considered a political and economic traitor.

**9:8.** After meeting Jesus, the tax collector/traitor was no longer the same man. He would enter the kingdom of God, but not as a wealthy man (see 18:25). He would take half of what he owned and give it to the poor. He would find the people he had overcharged on their tax bill and refund four times as much as he had cheated them. Thus, he took the Law of Moses seriously. Leviticus 5:16 and Numbers 5:7 demanded restitution plus twenty percent. Exodus 22:1 called for rustlers to repay four sheep for one (see 2 Sam. 12:6). The Dead Sea Scrolls and Roman law also contain incidents of fourfold restitution. Zacchaeus seems to have accepted the harshest penalty of the law and applied it to himself. He had a new lifestyle because he had a new Lord.

**19:9.** Jesus showed ultimate acceptance of the tax collector/traitor turned repentant sinner. Salvation had come to Zacchaeus and to his house. Jesus' mission had basically been a mission to the Jews, and this man was a Jew, participating in the covenant with Abraham, even if he acted the part of the traitor in Jewish eyes. For Jesus a repentant Jew from such a sordid background was better than a self-righteous Jew with no sense of the need for repentance (see 5:31-32).

**19:10.** The scene with Zacchaeus provides Luke's Gospel with its ultimate statement about Jesus. Jesus knew his purpose on earth. His purpose was not to reform the Jewish religion. His purpose was not to prove the Pharisees wrong. His purpose was not to bring in a military, political kingdom. His purpose was to bring salvation to lost people. Jesus dedicated the three years of his earthly ministry to finding people who knew they were lost and showing them God's way of salvation—the way of repentance and faith.

## THE AUSTIN STONE

GENEROSITY  
WEEK 2  
TRUST



**Generosity**  
A Gospel View of Our Finances

### MAIN POINT

Money matters to God, not because He's after our money, but because He's after our hearts. As we began our series last week, we saw that money is an amazing indicator of who owns our hearts. This week, we want to engage with two key questions surrounding money: what does God ask us to give Him from our finances, and why does God ask this of us?

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

**Who were some of the people or institutions that asked you for money in the last couple of weeks?**

**How do you find yourself typically responding when people ask you for money?**

**What filter do you use to decide how much and to whom to give?**

As we dig into the what and why of giving to the Lord, we will see that the biblical approach to money is founded on the principle of stewardship. Because God is the true and rightful owner of the universe, He has the right to ask us for whatever He wants to. But because He asks us for not only regular giving but also the first and best of our finances, we have an opportunity to display through giving the kind of trust that pleases God.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> **READ LEVITICUS 27:30-33.**

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**In this passage about tithing, what sticks out the most to you?**

**In verse 30, what is the basis for tithing?**

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it; He has cattle on a thousand hills. Everything in the universe belongs to God, which means that we are only managers of what He has given us. In order to live generously, we have to first recognize that we aren't giving anything to God that's not already His.

**What's the difference between an owner and a steward or manager? What is the responsibility of the steward in terms of his relationship with the owner?**

## GROUP GUIDE

**Is it possible to give rightly if you don't see yourself as a steward? Why or why not? Give a personal example of a time when you failed to see yourself as a steward of what God has given you.**

If we never recognize the ownership of God, we will feel, at least at times, that we are doing God a favor by giving to Him. But when we recognize our responsibility as managers in light of God's ownership, our giving will be not only willing but grateful for what God has entrusted to us.

**Look back at verse 30. Why is it important that this tithe was holy to the Lord rather than for common use?**

If something is holy, it is set apart for special use. That's what we are doing when we tithe; we are devoting income for holy purposes. Unfortunately, many times we take what God intends for holy purposes and use it in common ways. That's what the people were doing in Malachi 3.

**> READ MALACHI 3:8-9.**

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**How do we rob God when we exchange what is to be used for holy purposes for common purposes?**

**Given the seriousness of robbing God, why do you think so many of us still struggle to tithe?**

Refusing to give is robbery, according to Malachi. Despite that fact, we still want to hang onto what we think belongs to us. But the deeper issue here is not just about our behavior with money; it's about what we believe about God. Our refusal to give shows what we believe about Him.

**When we tithe, what are we communicating about the nature and character of God?**

**Why is tithing more than a behavior issue, but also a trust issue?**

When you give God the first and best, you are literally putting your money where your mouth is. You are demonstrating that God is good enough and powerful enough to provide all that you need. If our money is truly a window to our hearts, the way we treat tithing is a clear sign of whether we believe God is truly good and trustworthy.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**If someone asked you why Christians tithe, how would you respond based on our discussion?**

Think about some things you know are true about God. What are some ways we can display those truths through the way we use money?

Should this issue be more than just a personal commitment? How can we help each other make those decisions?

### PRAYER

Pray that your trust in God and confidence in His character would increase. As it does, pray that you would obediently follow that trust with your finances.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **What opportunities have you seen to trust God in your financial decisions this week?**
  - **What obstacles to doing so do you still see?**
- The challenge to memorize Malachi 3:8-9.



**LEVITICUS 27:30-33**

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In addressing what may be vowed, dedicated, or devoted to the Lord, the instruction finally turns to the tithe, for the tithe pertains to everything from the land (27:30). The word "tithe" is related to the number "ten" and thus refers to a tenth. The concept of a tithe was not a new one for the Israelites, since we observe the practice before the giving of the Law (Gen 14:20; 28:20–22). Thus what we have in Leviticus 27 is a systematization of an earlier practice. In these texts from Genesis, as is the case also in this legislation from Leviticus, the tithe is taken from among the animal possessions (see Deut 12:17; 14:23).

There were three tithes for the ancient Israelites: (1) the general tithe (Lev 27), the tithe of the sacred meal with the Levite (Deut 14:22–27), and the tithe paid every three years to the poor (Deut 14:28–29). This text addresses the general tithe. Apparently the tithe was determined by counting every tenth animal that passed under the shepherd's rod (27:32). This counting method appears to be the basis of Jer 33:13 and Ezek 20:37. The tithe was taken to maintain the Levites (Num 18:21–24), who in turn tithed their gifts to the priests (Num 18:25–32). The subject of tithes is addressed in Neh 10:38–39; 13:5, 12; 2 Chr 31:5–6, 12. In Amos 4:4 the people placed an imbalanced value on the giving of the tithe, while in Mal 3:8–10 they neglected it. As with vows, the tithed items could be repurchased based on the value of the object plus 20 percent (27:31).

The issue of paying vows is related to the overall concerns of Leviticus, for the paying of vows often is associated with and parallel to praising God (Pss 22:26; 61:9; 63:2) or making a praise offering. This practice was assumed in the New Testament (Matt 23:23; Acts 18:18; 21:23), yet vows were abused when they were used to escape other obligations (Matt 15:3–9; Mark 7:9–13). Like the Israelites, Christians are called to be holy, and holiness pertains to all of one's life, since all one's possessions are actually from the Lord. In fact, it could be argued that the Christian is called to a higher ethical plane.

The theology of tithing is found in Deut 26:10–15. Proportionate giving is the subject of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Giving of at least a tithe is a way of expressing that everything we own comes from God. Those who make this their practice receive back far more than the sacrifices they make!

**MALACHI 3:8-9**

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Israel was a nation of thieves, swindling God Himself. God made plain that His people robbed Him by not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions (v. 8).

People also robbed God by withholding the payments of the tenth (literally, "tenth part") or "tithes." The practice of giving 10 percent as an act of worship began with Abraham (Gen. 14:20). Later, God commanded for all Israel that "every tenth of the land's produce" and "every tenth animal ... will be holy to the Lord" (Lev. 27:30–32). In Malachi's day, the tenth was to go into the storehouse of God. Tithing was deeply rooted in Israelite history and law. God's people committed a great sin by withholding the tithes that God commanded them to give. They needed to return to God.

The Lord explained that His people were suffering under a curse because of their sin of withholding the tenth and the contributions (v. 9). From Malachi 3:11, it seems that the curse was in the form of a devourer that ruined crops and vineyards. The devourer could have been swarms of locusts (see Joel 1:4; 2:25). The Lord promised that if His people would bring the full tenth into the storehouse of the temple, He would pour out blessings from heaven and rebuke the devourer so that His people would enjoy harvest bounties without measure (v. 10).

### THE AUSTIN STONE

GENEROSITY

WEEK 3

GIVING IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL



**Generosity**  
A Gospel View of Our Finances

#### MAIN POINT

In our Generosity series, we've seen that money is the indicator for who owns our hearts. We've also seen that regular giving is an opportunity to display our trust in the God who always provides in a good way. As we conclude our series, we want to look at the ultimate motivation for generosity—the gospel. In light of the gospel, we will see the true question we must ask is not how much do we give, but how much do we dare keep?

#### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

**What is one way your perspective on money and generosity has been influenced during this series?**

**How would you describe the mindset of someone who has a God-centered view of finances? What kinds of questions does those people ask themselves about money?**

**How do you think people like that look at generosity?**

As we've seen, the Old Testament is pretty straightforward in answering the question about how much to give to God. It's the tithe—one tenth. But for the Christian, that isn't the end of the issue; it's really the beginning. We see in the New Testament, in light of the gospel, the question isn't so much how much we have to give, but how much we dare to keep for ourselves.

#### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**What is wrong with asking, "How much am I required to give?" What does a question like that reveal about the heart of the inquirer?**

The problem with asking that question is that it's based on a minimum. We want to know the least amount we are required to do. But in the New Testament, Jesus consistently taught that focusing on the minimum, whether about money or another moral issue, reveals something about our hearts. Look at how He spoke about these issues to the Pharisees in Matthew 23.

**> READ MATTHEW 23:23.**

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**Do you think the Pharisees would have asked how much they were required to give? Why or why not?**

**Jesus shows us what was wrong with their approach to giving. What was it?**

**What does Jesus teach us about the nature of giving in this passage?**

Jesus affirmed the practice of tithing in this verse, but He also teaches us that the tithe is just the beginning. The Pharisees were focused on the minimum because their hearts were stubborn and closed to grace. But when we begin to see the nature of the gospel, we shift from focusing on the bare minimum required. When we begin to see how richly we've been blessed in Christ, the natural response is to give because of that blessing. This is what Paul shows us in Ephesians 1.

**> READ EPHESIANS 1:3.**

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**What are some of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places we've been blessed with in Christ?**

**What does this verse indicate about the character of God?**

**What are some reasons we might have trouble believing the truth that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ?**

God is not a miser. In the gospel, He has not held anything back from us. He has richly and generously blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Part of the reason we struggle with generosity is that we fail to realize the extent to which God has blessed us in Christ.

**Do you agree that sometimes we fail to realize the extent to which we've been blessed in Christ? Why or why not?**

**What do you think will be some of the tangible effects of growing in the knowledge of how richly we've been blessed in Jesus?**

One of the ways we know that we are growing in our understanding of the gospel is our generosity. We give richly because we have received richly. If we want to be more generous, it's not just a matter of changing our behavior. Our true motivation for generous giving comes from seeing over and over again how much God has given us in Christ. So how much are we required to give? The better question, in light of the gospel, is how much do we dare to keep?

### APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

> **READ 2 CORINTHIANS 9:7.**

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**Have you seen your attitude toward giving change since you've been a Christian? How?**

**How would dwelling on the depths of the gospel produce the kind of cheerful giving Paul described here?**

**How are you going to remind yourself this week of the richness of God's blessings in the gospel?**

**Given what we've discussed, how would you answer the question of how much are you required to give in light of the gospel?**

### PRAYER

Pray that you would continue to grow in your knowledge of the fullness of the gospel. Ask God to open your eyes to the richness of His blessings in Christ and that the awareness would lead to the kind of cheerful generosity God desires.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **How are you reminding yourself of the blessings of God in Christ today?**
  - **How are you seeing your attitude toward generosity change as you do?**
- The challenge to memorize Ephesians 1:3.

**MATTHEW 23:23**

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In accordance with Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21-32; and Deuteronomy 14:22, the scribes and Pharisees meticulously tithed a tenth of everything, including their tiny garden herbs. Jesus did not discourage this since these things should have been done. However, He rebuked the Jewish leaders for obsessing with ritual matters while overlooking the true essence of religion as described in Micah 6:8. When people reject the Lord's direction and go their own way, they eventually experience disillusionment and disaster. God had been most gracious to Israel, but the nation continued to disregard His will and His ways. The people had been allowed to return from exile, but they generally lived according to their own values rather than God's principles. The temple had been rebuilt, but worship had become primarily a matter of going through the motions. People regularly offered worthless and unsuitable animals to the Lord, and they did even that reluctantly (see Mal. 1:6-14). Priests misled the people with false teachings (see Mal. 2:1-9). Infidelity in worship and marriage was common (see Mal. 2:10-16). People were saying, "Everyone who does wrong is good in the LORD'S eyes" (see Mal. 2:17). The people suffered the consequences of their own choices. Apparently, drought and crop failures had brought great distress throughout the land (see Mal. 3:10-11). Cynicism and depression were prevalent. The people needed a fresh word from the Lord.

**EPHESIANS 1:3**

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The verb **blessed** as applied to God points first to His kindness extended to others. Its meaning also includes praises returned to Him by those whom He has blessed. The Heavenly Father is the Source of our every spiritual blessing—and for that matter of our material blessings. Here, however, Paul focused on benefits that exist in the heavens, that is, the supernatural realm invisible to natural sight.

**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7**

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**9:6.** Some Corinthian Christians may have reasoned that the more they gave, the less they would have and the more likely they would become dependent on the giving of others. Paul explained how the grace of giving operates in the lives of those who trust in God. A farmer reaps in proportion to what he sows. A wise farmer sows generously in order to reap generously. He was not advocating that we give so we can get rich. On the contrary, one's giving is an expression of God's grace.

**9:7.** Generous giving is not to be done haphazardly but purposefully. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart. The word **decided** indicates a choice and could be translated "purposed." Again, Paul made clear he was not trying to compel the Corinthians to give. Individuals are responsible to God for their giving.