

life group study guide

GENEROUS LIVING

October 28, 2012



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1 Timothy 6:11-21

Bruce Wilkinson, in his book "You Were Born For This", tells a great personal story in the chapter entitled "The Money Key: You were born to deliver miracles of financial provision".

One late night after a speaking engagement in Johannesburg, my son David and I were suddenly attacked by the same desperate thought: we just had to have some ice cream. It's true. My son and I seem to share the double-strength dessert gene. We rushed back to the hotel where we were staying in hopes that the restaurant would still be open. We made it just in time.

When the waitress came to take our order, I said, "You have no idea how glad we are to find you! We've rushed back here from across town just for ice cream."

What she said next was heartbreaking. "I'm so sorry, sir. Our kitchen just closed for the night. I can't serve you ice cream, but could I get you some coffee?"

David and I looked at each other. Had we hurried to the restaurant for nothing? I decided to ask again. "Sure, we'll take some decaf. But is there any way you could find some ice cream for two guys who would really appreciate it?" She smiled. "I'll see what I can do."

*As she walked away, I received an unexpected but unmistakable God-nudge. In some way we were here for her too, not just for ice cream. The nudge was clear and specific: **Give her a big tip.** Actually, it was more like: **Give her a very big tip.***

And we hadn't gotten any ice cream yet.

After I told David about the nudge, he said, "Dad, I was just thinking the same thing. A really big tip for what, though?"

We both laughed. But my laughter concealed the discomfort I was feeling. You see, I'd been to the bank recently and happened to have a large roll of rand (the South African currency) in my pocket. In my heart God had clearly linked the very big tip with that roll of bills. They seemed to be one and the same.

Well, I can tell you that God loves people who love ice cream. The waitress came back from the kitchen with two big bowls of it...and coffees to go with them.

As we were finishing, I took the bills out of my pocket, folded them into a bundle, and held it ready under the table. When the waitress walked up with the check, I said, "You were so kind to find us that ice cream when the kitchen was closed. We appreciate your extraordinary service and want to give you a tip that reflects that." Then I slipped the money into her apron pocket. I didn't even want David to see how much it was.

Can you guess what I was feeling at that moment? Not heroic, insightful or generous. No, more like awkward. I didn't want to be misinterpreted. In a hotel in Johannesburg, like in many other places, the only reason a man would give that kind of money to a woman is if he's trying to buy her favors for the night. What was God up to?

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Three minutes later the waitress came rushing back to our table. “You know Jesus, don’t you?” she said with tears in her eyes.

“Yes.”

*“I knew it! This is a miracle!” she exclaimed. “I have a baby, and we couldn’t pay rent, and the landlord was going to kick us out of our apartment tomorrow morning. I prayed to God on the way to work this afternoon: Please, God, send us the money, or we’ll be living on the street.” She wiped at her eyes. “Sir, this amount is exactly the rent I owe – **to the rand**. That’s how I knew you know Jesus.”*

David and I walked out of that restaurant two happy men.

1 Timothy 6:18 commands us to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, we will lay up treasure for ourselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that we may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Do you see the signs of God at work in Bruce Wilkinson’s ice cream adventure? God is always at work behind the scenes of our lives, orchestrating the place and timing for a miracle. God nudges us to connect with a person in need. God arranges the event so that when the miracle happens, the recipient knows in his or her heart that God intervened specifically for them.

- 1.) There is no greater concern for people all over the world today than financial provision. How would your life change if God worked through you on a regular basis to miraculously meet the money-related needs of others?
- 2.) Notice especially the phrase “generous and willing to share”. How exactly do you think God moves money around to meet needs on earth? Specifically, how would He do that for you?

While God certainly could somehow transfer cash into your account...or print some currency and drop it out of the sky onto your doorstep...or take out a loan on His earthly assets to meet a need...or arrange for an angel to deliver the funds from the vaults of heaven...every indication is that He doesn’t! God seems to get funds to a person in need when another human being releases some of his or her own funds for that purpose.

A verse from Proverbs succinctly describes God’s transfer process:

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord.”

Surprising, isn’t it? The moment a generous, willing-to-share person gives in response to a God-nudge, an “invisible transfer” takes place in heaven. With the same funds, the generous person “lends to the Lord” and another person’s prayer for a financial miracle is answered.

- 1.) If we give generously as Bruce did in his ice cream story, are we violating the concept of only giving money in secret and not in public?
- 2.) What if we choose to give money to the wrong person?
- 3.) What if the person uses the money for wrong things, like drugs?

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- 1.) Remember that this is God's money and God's miracle! Our work for Him is successful when people recognize what happened...NOT as good work on our part, but as visible proof that God did something wonderful and we were merely His delivery agent.
- 2.) Giving money to the wrong person can happen if we act without a nudge or misinterpret a nudge. God is so eager to give financial miracles to people who need them that He's going to clearly and unmistakably reveal to you the person He has in mind for you.
- 3.) People can misuse the money they've been given, but it's much rarer than you might think. Remember that a financial miracle is tailor-made by God to meet a specific need in a person's life. Ultimately, we trust that He will guide us to the right people and to the specific need He wants us to meet. Of course, we also need to be wise and learn from our mistakes! Thankfully, God can use a gift that might seem misdirected at the time to make an impact later.

While we are understandably cautious about giving away our resources when we see no apparent benefit or payback to us, Jesus isn't. Have you ever noticed? Consider His advice in Luke 14 on how to serve up dinner:

"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid."

Jesus is telling us something wonderful (and totally life-changing) about Heaven's view of giving. Let's paraphrase it this way: If you sign up for a miracle life, don't play it safe! Give to those who are most overlooked or rejected by others. Give them a feast they'll never forget. And take the risk of getting nothing back, because now you know this truth: God repays those who lend to Him! Question: How could you throw a feast for someone in need today? Where would you start? By practicing the grace of sharing, a person is storing up a treasure for himself. GIFTS ARE INVESTMENTS. By giving materially, one enriches himself spiritually and assures himself of future reward. That treasure in heaven consists of the following:

- a. A good conscience (1 Timothy 1:5)
- b. An enthusiastic reception by those who have benefited (Luke 16:9)
- c. The entrance into all the joys and glories of Heaven.

Salvation, to be sure, is entirely by *grace through faith*, but the believer's reward in Heaven is *according to works*.

This treasure will be an excellent foundation upon which to build when the believer's works are taken into account. The believer himself will not have to give a review of his or her own good works. In fact, if they were really *good* works, he or she will not even be able to do so. Christ will do it for them! (Matthew 25: 40) The believer, having listened to the words of approval from Christ, will then enter into the fullest enjoyment of "the life that is truly life".