

Receiving and Giving  
July 8, 2018

I know some here play the lottery and others do not. But I want both groups to think about this question. Would your life be better or worse if you won big in the lottery?

There have been a number of studies done on people who win big in the lottery. For many, life becomes worse, more stressful, with negative changes they did not anticipate.

The first is that many people who win it big end up with worse relationships than before. They find that they have lots of friends and family who expect to get some of the riches. Everybody wants a piece of the pie and expects you to share it. And if you don't, or you don't give as much as they want, it sours the relationship.

A second way life changes for the worse is that they become a bigger target of charities, inventors, entrepreneurs, and con artists looking for donations, loans, or investments.

A third way life changes for the worse is that you are tempted to become more materialistic. They become more focused on worldly things. Many give to church and charities, but also spend a lot on themselves, filling their lives with more of the world's things.

And a fourth way that your life could become worse is that you may focus less on spiritual things. Though this last is not just a temptation to the rich, but to anyone who is enjoying the good things of this world. Anyone who is living comfortably is liable to this temptation. That is why God taught this to the Israelites. We're going to look at this teaching in Deuteronomy.

I remind you that Christians live under God's grace in Christ instead of under the Old Testament Law of Moses. But those Laws reflect important principles that can give wisdom to our lives too.

The Israelites at one point in their history, were slaves in Egypt. God sent a man named Moses to lead them to freedom. God led them, through Moses, to the Sinai wilderness and eventually to the land of Canaan. God was going to settle the Israelites in the land of Canaan. The Canaanites were extremely evil. God had given them over 400 years to repent of their evil ways and they had not. So God had judged them and condemned them to death. God was going to use Israelites to make it happen.

The Israelites marched into the land of Canaan and God gave them victory over the people living there. Then they moved into the cities, the houses, and the farms.

Now picture this. They did not have to build houses. They did not have to build barns or put up fencing. They did not have to plant vineyards or orchards. They did not have to start towns and cities. All of these things already existed. They simply moved in. It was kind of like winning the lottery.

In addition to their great start, God promised to prosper them greatly. But there was a danger in having this new, comfortable lifestyle. God warned them of this danger.

**Deuteronomy 8:10-14, 17-18 (NIV) When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.**

**You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...**

Well, history shows that the Israelite people did become proud and forget about God. They did fail to worship only Him and obey Him. The danger was real and became a reality.

Many years later, Jesus warned His disciples that it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. It was hard then, and it is hard today. It is too easy for the person who is well-off materially to say, "I don't have need of God. I have worked for everything I have."

Yes, we work for what we have. But it is God who enables us to work. God has provided all the means to work, the health, the education, the opportunities, and more. Verse 18 remind us of this and warns us.

**Don't be proud of what you have, but humble yourself, giving thanks for it.**

There is great spiritual danger in having more than we need. We don't like to admit this, but others, those who usually have less than they need, see the danger.

Not too many decades ago a Christian couple was ministering to Christians in Communist Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain. The couple had brought in Christian literature, blankets, and other necessary items. As the church gathered, the couple assured the local Christians that Christians in America were praying for them in Eastern Europe.

One local leader replied, "We are happy for that, but we feel that Christians in America need more prayer than we do. We here in Eastern Europe are suffering, but you in America are very comfortable; and it is always harder to be a good Christian when you are comfortable." Did you hear that? It is always harder to be a good Christian when you are comfortable.

Similar to that statement, God was warning the Israelites of the danger to their relationship that their comfort could lead to. That is also why Jesus taught us to lay up treasure in heaven instead of treasures on earth. And it is why Paul warns in his letter to Timothy of the spiritual dangers of prosperity.

That is not to say you should live poor. God has enabled you to have the income you have, but for HIS reasons. **There are several reasons God enables us to prosper financially.** Let's look at them.

**1. God gives us the ability to provide for our needs.**

God gives the ability to work and expects us to do so. He expects us to fulfill our basic needs.

**This includes my family, both immediate and extended.**

**1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV) If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

God gives us the ability to provide for our needs and to help meet the needs of our family.

**2. God gives more than we need so we can share with others in their need.**

We see this practiced in the first church.

**Acts 4:34-35 (NIV) There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.**

Loving each other in the church became, by the Holy Spirit's leading, a quality of all the churches. God prospers us so that we can help the poor around us, especially those who are in the church.

**3. God gives more than we need so we can support missions.**

This too we see in the New Testament. Paul worked as a tentmaker to support himself in many of the cities he visited. But some of the churches, without being asked, contributed to his expenses so he could focus full-time on ministering the Gospel. (Philippians 4:14-19)

We give to pay our church staff, provide for our church facilities, and resource our church's ministries. We also give to support our missionaries around the world.

We are grateful for our salvation, thankful that someone shared the gospel with us so we could be saved. And so we help share the Gospel around the world that others can be saved. **Not everyone who hears the gospel will get saved. But the only people who will get saved are those who hear the gospel.** We give so that others might hear. God blesses us financially so we can help the work of missions.

#### **4. God gives more than we need so we can enjoy it and celebrate His provided bounty.**

The extra God provides beyond our basic needs isn't just for giving. It is for enjoying too. It is fascinating that God built into the Jewish calendar each year, days of feasting. God was going to prosper their farming and in that prosperity God expected them to celebrate with a big party.

It pleases God when we celebrate his blessings to us. Our Thanksgiving service of worship pleases God, but so do our feasting later in the day. We see this not only in the old testament, but in the new as well.

#### **1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV) God... provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**

God wants us to enjoy the good things he provides and celebrate our blessings. This glorifies God and pleases Him.

But I must caution you not to focus on this one statement to the exclusion of the rest. In fact, take note of the context of this statement. It appears in a paragraph about helping others and the cautions previously stated. Look at the whole passage.

#### **1 Timothy 6:17-18 (NIV) Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.**

There are two different ideas here about our prosperity. There is the fact that every good thing God provides should bring us joy. At the same time all these good things are not to be squandered just on us.

#### **There is a tension between these four points.**

God does not clear up the tension. He does not tell us how much to give to basic needs, what percentage to use to help family, how much to give to the poor, or how much to donate to the church and missions support. God does not resolve the tension of how to use what he has provided.

Why? I believe it is because the tension is designed to help prevent pride keep us coming back to him in prayer for direction. If God just gave percentages of what to use for each category, you could do that without giving any more thought to God. Instead, your giving should bring you back to God in worship and humble submission seeking his will for you individually. Seeking God and His will is what God wants of us. Giving is simply a context for doing that. So do so. Plan to give. Plan to seek God's presence and will in your giving.

Invitation

God is a giving God. God gave what He did not have to give. He gave us life. He gave us knowledge of Himself. He gave us knowledge of our sin. And he gave us the savior we needed.

Today, put your faith in Jesus, who died for your sins, so you can enjoy the life God created you for.