

Melva's Corner

PROSPERITY IS A LIFESTYLE

October 3, 2005

Bible Text: Genesis 8:22

Central Truth: God's Word defines rich as "able to be generous."
God's Word also says we'll be made rich in every way.

I Will Make You Rich in Every Way

Years ago, a man was building a house in rural New England. Needing water for his new home, he commissioned an expert to dig him a well. The old well digger, seasoned in the art of his trade, scouted out the property, searching for the right spot to sink a shaft. Sure enough, he found an underground river and put in a well. Packing up his gear to leave, he left the home owner with some important advice: "Every day you must pump some water from the well. If you don't, you'll be sorry." The home owner thanked the man for the advice, and for weeks he followed the well digger's counsel and pumped water every day.

As time went on, the home owner began to take the cool, sweet water for granted. One day he left on a trip and forgot to get someone to pump water for him each day while he was away. When he returned, the water at the bottom of the well was stagnant and almost gone. He tried pumping in fresh water, but nothing came out. Later, he went to town and told the well digger his well had dried up. The old gentleman asked, "Did you remember to pump water from the well every day?" The younger man confessed his neglect and asked why this mattered. The well digger replied, "The water in the well comes from an underground river that feeds the small tributaries of water which are connected to your well. Water must continue to flow through these small tributaries so that the well can receive water. If you quit pumping the water, the ground will dry up slightly and the underground river can't find its way to your well. This cuts off the water supply." Then the old man concluded, "Remember, the source of the water is the river, not the well."

If the source of your financial strength is your own personal well of resources, you risk running dry!

The Difference Between Source and Supply

Recognizing the difference between source and supply can be tough. Our bank accounts, our abilities, and our intellects are not the sources of our provision and blessings. They are simply the means by which God, the Source, provides blessing. God provides for our needs according to the riches of Christ. He uses the material resources of our world as the delivery system to care for us. To experience His abundance, we must first see Him as the Source of every blessing.

Secondly, we must take Him at His word because we trust that His word is true. Spiritual principles about giving relate closely to how God chooses either to bless us or to withhold His blessing. If we want our wells to contain enough resources to function effectively in the world, we must trust God and follow His teachings on the subject. The Word teaches that giving generously out of love for God will tap you into God's unseen river of blessing. **God Will Be the Source of Your Blessing**

We will improve our attitudes about giving when we recognize that God will be the source of our blessings. In Paul's thank you note to the church at Philippi for their financial support, he says, **"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19)**. Paul said God would meet every need they had. That is an awesome promise to Believers.

God's Law of the Seed Time & Harvest

The way we share our funds may be the most practical issue we face. Every successful farmer knows that he must sow seed if he wants to reap a crop. Scripture clearly teaches this concept. It is often referred to as the "law of seed time and harvest." Simply stated, the more you want to reap, the more you have to sow.

This principle is first found in **Genesis 8:22: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."** This passage concerns physical planting and harvest. But throughout the Bible you'll find that the law of the harvest applies to more than just the physical

production of crops. It applies to virtually every part of our lives, including our moral behavior. **"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows"** (Galatians 6:7).

Another illustration of this law appears in Matthew 17. When Jesus' disciples were unable to cast out an evil spirit from a boy, he told them, **"I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you"** (vv. 20, 21). Jesus' point is clear. If you sow even a tiny amount of faith, you will reap enormous spiritual results.

The Holy Spirit guided Paul to use harvest imagery to encourage our becoming generous givers when Paul wrote, **"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously"** (II Corinthians 9:6).

God Promises Rewards

Giving to the Lord is, in fact, a God-backed, guaranteed investment, not an uncertain gamble. Jesus uses the promise of reward to teach us. He teaches us to give without a public display because the glory should go to God, not man: **"Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"** (Matthew 6:4). God promises to reward the person who gives.

Jesus also teaches that **"if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, . . . he will certainly not lose his reward"** (Matthew 10:42). Again, the Lord reinforces a cause-and-effect relationship between giving and receiving.

The healthy desire for rewards is a legitimate motivation for Christians today. The classic text on faith, **Hebrews 11:6, tells us that God "rewards those who earnestly seek him."** In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus compares giving to storing up treasures in heaven (v. 20). He tells His followers not to worry about the physical needs of life because God will take care of His children! This passage fits today, doesn't it? God longs for us to trust Him enough to **"seek first His kingdom and his righteousness."** As we do, Jesus promises that **"all these things will be given to you as well"** (v. 33). **"All these things"** includes necessities of life such as food and

clothing. Jesus gives us permission to expect God to reward His children when we trust Him to provide.

God's teaching on generosity is also expressed with another principle: Trust God to reward true obedience. In general, it's easy to accept this principle in the Word of God. We see a number of examples verifying this idea throughout Scripture. We trust God to bless children who obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-3). We trust God to make **"all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28, KJV)**. And we trust God to save us when we obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9). If we didn't believe God was trustworthy in keeping His promises, there would be little point in following Jesus.

Unfortunately, many Believers act as if this principle applies in all areas of life except in their financial dealings. I know many Christians who are convinced that they can't afford to give to God. The reason? Fear. It's one thing to believe in God; it's another to trust God to provide the rent payment. When you're engulfed in financial hardships, it's humanly impossible to think about giving. Yet, **"what is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27)**. When God asks us to trust Him with our finances, He also promises to reward us. He doesn't always spell out the exact ways He will repay our trust, but He does promise us a rich reward (II Corinthians 9:11).

Also, understand that this is not what some have called the "get rich gospel." Any prosperity theology that attempts to turn God into some kind of genie in a bottle is merely a selfish abuse of Scripture. God has promised rewards that include financial blessings, but we must be committed to following His purpose.

Specific Rewards We're Promised

God promises us many rewards when we give. Here are three specific rewards:

Reward 1 — You will be made rich in every way. In His letter to the Corinthian church, Paul gives an interesting definition of the word rich: **Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every**

occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (II Corinthians 9:10, 11).

God's Word defines rich as "able to be generous." God's Word also says we'll be made rich in every way. This proves we should never limit the extent of God's blessing to only the spiritual or emotional arena. God promises that if we give to Him, He will give us the financial capacity to be generous. The Bible describes riches as both spiritual and material. Of all the riches we can possess, none of them is more important than spiritual riches. Scripture speaks about the riches of God's grace, God's glory, His understanding, His wisdom, and His insight. When we are generous givers, we have access to all of these riches.

Paul explains to the Corinthians that financial decisions have physical advantages as well. He isn't merely referring to the emotional or spiritual blessings we can receive from giving. He is saying that financial generosity leads to greater financial resources—even physical wealth! This is the clear, unbiased teaching of Scripture.

However, if you have the desire to be wealthy so that you can spend these resources on yourself, don't expect to claim this reward (I Timothy 6:9, 10). The so-called "get rich gospel" teaches that Christians should give to get. But God says we should give to get to give again. This, in a nutshell, is my "theology of generosity" (Titus 3:14). I believe we have steered so far away from the ditch of the get rich gospel that most Believers now find themselves in the ditch on the other side of the road. We're hesitant to take God at His Word and believe or teach what Scripture teaches. The text says we'll be made rich in every way, which means we'll be able to share.

I spoke with a friend who is a successful businessman and an elder in his church. Over the years he has counseled more than fifty couples who were in deep financial difficulty. When they came to him for advice about solving their money problems, he agreed to help if they would decide to give ten cents of every dollar they made to the "Lord". My friend said every couple who followed through not only got their financial house in order, they had the opportunity to do good for God. That's a tremendous track record!

If deep in your heart you have the desire to be a good manager of God's resources and want to be generous in meeting needs so that people give thanks to God, then you must expect God to provide. Paul set the stage for the proper desires of our heart when he wrote, "**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**" (II Corinthians 8:9). It's difficult to twist the Scriptures into a selfish interpretation when you keep the focus on Jesus!

God doesn't oppose blessing us with material well-being, as long we keep their desires and fortunes devoted to Him. First Chronicles 29:12 tells us that wealth comes from God. Passages like Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 3:9, 10; and Malachi 3:10 will help us overcome our fears about God's provision.

The Old Testament clearly tells us that God made people like Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Job wealthy. In the New Testament we read of wealthy people of God, like Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, and others. If there were no wealthy Christians, there would be no need for this kind of teaching. If God hated material wealth, why would He grant physical riches as a reward to many of His people? God wants to reward His faithful, generous followers with both spiritual and material riches. I believe this is true because it is taught in God's Word.

Reward 2 — You will receive more than you give. When was the last time you read **Luke 6:38? "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."**

Jesus says to tap into God's economy. The Lord is a generous provider. You won't run out of money! Don't be afraid to give. When you give, you also receive-- "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." I've never seen an exception to this rule. You always receive more than you give. If you give love, you receive more love. If you give friendship, you receive more friends in return. I've even noticed if you give a smile to someone, you will receive more smiles. So it follows from Scripture and practical experience that if you give money, you receive more money.

In my early years I struggled with this text. I thought it was materialistic to think God would bless me financially when I gave money to do His work. But, in reality, the materialistic view is thinking that my own ingenuity is the only source of my ability to make money. A spiritual person obeys and trusts God to release His blessings and provide all the resources of life. The unspiritual person believes human effort is the source of material wealth.

Reward 3 — You will receive a greater blessing. Acts 20:35 shares a familiar quotation of our Lord: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We all agree that it's a blessing to receive, but Jesus says it's an even greater blessing to give! However enjoyable you think receiving is, Jesus says giving is better—it is more blessed. I've pondered Jesus' statement for years. How could giving bring a greater blessing? This initially made no sense to me, especially as a young child. Like most kids, I always hoped for a big haul under the tree on Christmas morning. I had my wish list and was never bashful about sharing it with my loveones.

But then I received revelation as to what the Scripture really meant. First, I receive a greater blessing by helping someone and seeing their excitement or appreciation. Second, I receive a greater blessing by realizing God has given me something to share. What if I were the one in need? Having something to share creates feelings of gratitude for God's provision. Third, I receive a greater blessing because I have something else to look forward to. Giving allows me to participate in God's economy, where my financial investments in His kingdom generate remarkable returns.

A preacher friend of mine has a quick, three-point outline on giving that he drew from Galatians 6:7. He says: (1) You reap what you sow; (2) you reap more than you sow; and (3) you reap after you sow. When I use this Scripture to see the way God works, I see giving in a different light. Giving is not an expense, it's an opportunity!

Receive Blessings "In Kind"

Both common sense and these passages imply that the type of seed you sow determines the kind of crop you will receive. If you sow corn, you will reap corn (Genesis 8:22). If you sow moral actions in your daily behavior, you will reap a moral life (Galatians

6:7). If you sow faith, you will reap faith (Matthew 17:20). If you sow financially, you will reap financially (II Corinthians 9:6).

This teaching is well represented throughout the Word of God. If you sow obedience to the gospel, you reap eternal life. If you sow Bible study, you reap spiritual insight. In Scripture, there is an exact match between the kind of thing you sow and the kind of thing you reap. This same cause-and-effect principle applies to judging, condemning, and forgiving (Luke 6:37). Jesus promises a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over" (v. 38). Jesus wants us to know not only that we receive more than we give, but that we receive the same kind of thing that we give. So Jesus tells us that the amount and kind of gift we give determines the amount and kind of gift we receive. I have found no exception in Scripture to this insight.

Trust God to Provide

God's Word calls us to have faith in His promises. If we see Him as the source of our blessings, we won't be afraid of running out of the physical resources we need. When you are facing too much month at the end of your money, remember God's promise to provide for your needs—and more. One of the most fantastic accounts of God's provision comes from II Kings 4:1-7. A poor widow came to Elisha the prophet and cried out to him in despair. Creditors were threatening to take away her two sons as slaves to pay her debts. When Elisha asked what resources she possessed, the woman replied that all she had was a small amount of oil. Elisha told her to go to all her neighbors and borrow as many of their empty jars as she could get. Then she was to go inside and start pouring oil from her jar into the empty jars. Her sons brought jars to her, and she kept pouring until all the jars were full. When she poured her oil into the last jar, the oil stopped flowing. Elisha then told her to sell the oil to pay her debts and live on what was left.

Not only did God provide for her, but the amount of God's provision was in direct proportion to her trust. He gave her as much oil as she was prepared to receive. And God will provide material blessings to meet our physical needs and gain our spiritual attention as well. God's response to money problems is the same as His answer to health concerns, family problems, or any other difficult circumstances. God wants us to trust Him, not

our job or our bank balance. Jesus said, **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).** Since God wants our hearts, He works through our finances. When we learn to trust Him with our money, we will learn to trust Him with anything—even our very lives!

Memory Text:

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." (Genesis 8:22)