

DAY 1 - (week beginning 20 May 2019)**Read - Matthew 6:19-34**

"...seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
(vs 33)

This well-known Scripture passage begins with Jesus telling us to: "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there is your heart" (vs 20-21). He is encouraging us to get our priorities right.

Our theme this week is 'Giving'. This is one of the secrets to storing up our 'treasures' in heaven.

Juan Carlos Ortiz, a well-known South American preacher, once challenged his congregation to store up their treasures in heaven and to give generously to God. His sermon must have been incredibly moving, because at the end of the service the steward who had collected the offering, brought house keys, car keys, etc. to Ortiz as some people had responded by giving their cars and homes to God! Ortiz returned the keys to the people with a condition - that the Lord now owned these cars and homes and that if He had a need for them at any time - e.g. transport or accommodation for a missionary or someone in need, He could call for them.

This made such an impression on me as a young University student, that I resolved to live my life this way - that everything I owned would belong to God, and that He need only ask, and I would share what I have with others. It was an idealistic commitment, but I have tried to be obedient to this call although I know I have failed constantly.

Prayer: *Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.* Frances R. Havergal

DAY 2**Read - 1 John 3:11-24**

"Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth". (vs 18)

My father is a retired Methodist Minister, and he would often begin his offertory prayer with this statement: "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."

In the above Scripture, John challenges us: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" (vs 17)

The second greatest commandment after loving God with all our being, Jesus says, is to "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

I read the following statement in an article about giving, and I quote: "Economist James Andreoni, has theories for why people give to charity. One is the "warm glow" theory, by which donors derive an internal satisfaction from giving, although their contributions may be entirely anonymous." I found this interesting, because even those who do not give with God's love in their hearts, have discovered the joy of giving. How much more, then, should we, as ones who are filled with the pure, selfless love of Christ, give willingly and generously - not selfishly, in order to experience the "warm glow", but in simple obedience to God and His love for us all.

If our hearts are closed to those in need around us, we need to pray for the love of Christ to become real to us. It is only as we are filled with His love and filled with love for Him, that our hearts are opened.

Prayer: *Almighty God, fill my heart with Your pure love. Let me know that Your love is abundant and generous. Help me to love You with all my heart.*

DAY 3**Read - Malachi 3:6-12**

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me." (vs8)

Are you tired of being told that as a Christian you should tithe? Many congregation members complain that preachers are constantly on their 'case' about money. This is often not the case, but each time money is mentioned in Church, some listeners feel their hackles rise.

The fact is that God has a lot to say in Scripture about money and our use of it. As we read, we discover that God expects us to share our resources with Him and His work on earth.

I was once with a group of children when a guest speaker addressed them. The first thing he did was to hand out sweets. He gave ten or so of the children a handful of sweets. He missed over a group and then handed out a bigger number of sweets to others as he spoke, and appeared totally unaware of his actions. He continued talking until he noticed a restlessness amongst the children. He stopped and asked what the problem was. "You've been unfair!" they complained. He asked them what they thought his intention might have been. They then realised that he had probably intended for those who had more to share with those who had none. He explained to the group that that was God's intention, too.

Jesus says: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:48b)

Prayer: *We give thee but thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be,
For all we have is thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from thee.* William W. How

DAY 4

Read - 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

"God loves the one who gives gladly". vs 7b

We have heard that we should tithe, but then are we 'off the hook'? How much should we give? What Paul tells the Corinthians is that if they give generously to God, He will give generously to them.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 Paul's expresses appreciation to the Macedonians for giving generously. He explains that "out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."(vs 2) This suggests that his answer to the question: "How much should one give?" would be: give all you readily, easily, and comfortably can, and then prove your zeal and wholeheartedness for God by giving something more.

This is certainly how John Wesley was thinking when he told his lay preachers, "Give all you can," and how C. S. Lewis was thinking when he directed a correspondent who had put this question to him, "Give till it hurts." Through constant giving, Wesley himself died almost penniless, and Lewis's private charities, so we are told, were huge.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for asking myself how little I can give. Help me to honestly lay my finances open to You. You know what's best for me and for the Church and for the people You put in my path to help. Guide me, please, show me how to bring glory to You.

DAY 5

Read - Luke 6:27-38

The Message Bible translation of Luke 6:38 says: "Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

I have written for four days about monetary giving, but, of course, 'Giving' is more than that. We should give our effort and energy, our time, our abilities, our spiritual gifts, etc. Often we have nothing else to give but our physical presence and support. In many cases, this is of more value than anything else.

When we are in conversation with someone, are we 'fully present' to them? Are we giving that person our full attention, or are we wondering how quickly we can extricate ourselves so that we can move off to someone more interesting? Sometimes it takes enormous energy to simply listen. It seems that very few people are good listeners. Perhaps listening, truly listening, is the best gift you could give someone today.

There are so many organisations, charities and churches who are crying out for support and for involvement. God has given us spiritual gifts which He expects us to use to build up and benefit His Body, the Body of Christ? Are giving back to Him the gifts He has given us so generously. Are we using the gift of our time responsibly? Is "I'm too busy to help you" an excuse we tend to make?

Prayer: Jesus, thank You that You gave even the least important people Your time and attention. Teach me to give my time and energy generously - no matter how I feel.

DAY 6

Read - Romans 12:1-21

"...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God". vs 1

I hope that you have taken the time to read this entire passage from Romans. Our giving to God is not an obligation. It is an *opportunity* to make full use of God's generosity to us. As we offer all of ourselves, our time, our talents and gifts, our finances, our families, our material possessions, to Him - He takes it all and multiplies it (as He did with the little boy's five loaves and two fish) and He blesses so many more than we could ever imagine!

What a privilege to be used by God to be a blessing to others! The amazing thing is that it is impossible to out-give God. So as we give and give, we discover, to our amazement, that we are not suffering, but that, actually, we are abundantly blessed in return! What a joyful state of heart and mind!

God challenges us to live simply and to live with His love in our hearts. As we live simply, uncluttered by unnecessary "stuff" in our lives, we are set free to be all He has created us to be.

The writer to the Romans says: "Love must be sincere, Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord." (vs 9-11)

Prayer: Lord God, You have been amazingly generous to us. Help us to learn to be generous to those around us and to pass Your blessing on to them.