



Theme: Becoming Better and Not Bitter ***"By Giving Ourselves Away"***



You also can get these Meditation Moments each day directly on your phone. Just text "**med moments**" to **970-426-0700** to receive the **daily Meditation Moment** each morning and start your day grounded in faith and peace.

Weekly Memory Verse:

21 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. – Matthew 6:21

Meditation Moments for Monday, August 18 – Read **Mark 12:41-44**. The Jerusalem Temple was a huge religious, social, and even business center, bustling and noisy. Sustaining the institution took many large gifts—and many people gave such gifts. Matthew 6:2 even hinted that some people hired people to play bugles to attract notice as they gave large gifts to the cause! But Jesus noticed and honored a different kind of giver. He praised a generous, trusting widow who gave her "fortune"—two tiny copper coins worth a tiny fraction of a day's wage—to the Temple. She could have been bitter about not having much, but instead she gave thanks to God for what she did have, finding a better life in giving herself away.



How much new equipment or staff salary would the widow's offering, which Jesus praised, have made possible for the Temple? Sometimes we think the only reason to give is to help the church, or other worthy institutions, is to pay for "stuff." In honoring the widow's trusting generosity, how did Jesus recognize the spiritual value in giving? How does giving, of any amount, enrich you rather than make you poorer?





The temple in Jesus' day had what we would consider ostentatious wealth. One might conclude that the temple officials would "waste" this widow's money. But this powerless woman, unaware that this waste might happen, acts in good faith and is the greatest giver in God's sight. Giving in "good faith" of course takes

learning all we can about how well recipients will use the gifts—but that's not a reason to just stop giving. As you ask God to guide your giving, how do you stay focused on giving to God, not just on people or institutions?

Prayer: *Lord of heaven and earth, teach me how to love you as much as the widow Jesus noticed. Teach me how to offer my time, talents, treasures, and myself for your glory. Amen.*


Tuesday, August 19 – Read **Matthew 6:19-24**. Jesus points out an important truth. We must choose what we value most. If a music group you love has a concert on the same night your favorite team has a big game, which do you attend? Jesus focused on the biggest choice all of us need to make in life—the choice of our ultimate, governing loyalty. Wealth in and of itself is value neutral, but Jesus said putting it at the emotional center of your life is not. He taught that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” and added, “You **cannot** serve God and wealth.”

 Scholar Craig Keener wrote in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* that “Mammon,” the word translated as “wealth” in verse 24, was “an Aramaic word for possessions or money, and Jesus seems to be personifying it as an idol.” Few of us would ever think of physically bowing down before our retirement account or a valued car or house. Given that, what do you think it looks like to make wealth an idol? What does it mean, tangibly, for you to choose to serve God rather than wealth?

 We can validly spend money on many things—vacations, collectibles we enjoy, prized belongings, tickets to special events, houses, retirement savings, and so on. But have you ever put money into something touted as “secure” that proved to be insecure? What do you think Jesus meant by collecting “treasures in heaven”? Where is your heart—do you put as much time and energy into “investing” in heaven as into earthly investments and spending options?

Prayer: *Jesus, you are Lord of my life, and I want to “collect treasures” in heaven. As I make specific, everyday choices of how to spend my time, energy, and money, increase my capacity to live out your values. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 20 – Read **Matthew 6:25-34**. Today's verses may feel extreme, against all common sense. But Jesus is using exaggeration to make a point, like when we say things like, “That bag weighs a ton.” He wants to get our attention to warn us against worry, not planning. Jesus' first hearers had reason to worry. They were mostly ordinary peasant people who had to often worry about where their next meal was coming from. Yet Jesus tells them not to worry about anything. He asks them to view the world with new eyes so they could see all around them evidence of God's care and provision.

 Jesus didn't condemn planning. He did say we need to have our values straight as we plan. How easy or hard do you find it to live out Jesus' wisdom to “desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness”? Be brutally honest with yourself. What wishes or dreams matter so much to you that you might want them more than God's kingdom and righteousness? What choices have you

made, or do you want to make, to keep those wishes and dreams in proper perspective?



Jesus seemed to anticipate modern research when he said in verse 27, “Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?” We know that worry does shorten our life! What inner arguments, if any, do you make about why it “makes sense” to worry, or why it would be “irresponsible” not to worry? How can you distinguish needs from wants, and make plans without distorting them with worry?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you modeled a life of peace and trust. Help me to keep learning how to live a life in which my energy can focus on your purposes rather than my fears. Amen.

Thursday, August 21 – Read **Luke 12:13-21, Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5**. Jesus’ sad parable underscored a basic kingdom principle captured in verse 15, “One’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions.” We can become bitter in life easily when we measure our life by the wrong things. The day comes for everyone when the only question left is, “Who will get all the ‘stuff’ I’ve worked so hard to accumulate?” Paul writes in Colossians and Ephesians that greed is a type of “idolatry,” of loving something else more than God. This life, and any material possessions we enjoy in it, will end. Only God can, and does, offer us eternity.



The man in Jesus’ story never asked the question, “How much do I need?” He never said, “Maybe I’ll give away some of this huge harvest I have.” How easy or hard is it for you to be generous with the money, time, or “stuff” you have? What wishes or fears get in the way of living generously? What helps you to avoid letting the stuff you think you “own” actually “own” you?



How do you understand Jesus’ challenging phrase about being “rich toward God”? What steps can you take, in your day-to-day life, to become “rich toward God”? What kinds of choices help you focus on the riches that last for eternity? How can you share that approach to life with your children, grandchildren, or other people with whom you have influence?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, whenever my life ends, I want to have my greatest treasure stored up with you, not left behind for an auctioneer to dispose of. Guide me into the kind of life that is rich toward you. Amen.

Friday, August 22 – Read **Mark 10:17-22**. An earnest young man asked Jesus what he needed to do to obtain eternal life. He seemed to acknowledge that he was bitter in life, even though he had much wealth, and he wanted something better. As Jesus “looked at him carefully and loved him,” he identified the man’s fixation on wealth as his main spiritual obstacle. The text doesn’t say how Jesus “saw” that. Maybe it was the man’s tailored robes or the kind of chariot he drove. Whatever it was, the man went away sad, unwilling and unable to reset his priorities. It didn’t seem to take him long to decide that he didn’t want a better, eternal, life THAT much.



Jesus’ words in verse 21 were personal for that specific young man, not a command intended to apply to all followers of Jesus in every situation.

Remember that God did NOT tell every affluent person in the Bible, such as Abraham in Genesis or Zacchaeus in Luke 19, to sell all they had. What was the heart issue Jesus tried to get the young man to face up to?



Jesus' startling words to the young man weren't a general command. Still, the young man's response poses the hard question for each of us: "Which possessions (if any) do I value so much that I'd choose them over following Jesus?" We know the young man turned away from the "treasure in heaven" Jesus offered. If Jesus asked you to give up, not everything, but maybe your biggest material treasure, what would that be? How would you answer?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you offer me heaven's riches. Give me a heart that can accurately assess the treasure of your kingdom, valuing it properly against any other claims. Amen.*

Saturday, August 23 – Read **2 Corinthians 9:6-15** and **Exodus 25:2**. Paul was gathering a gift for Christians in Jerusalem who were experiencing a food shortage starvation due to a drought. He was more concerned with the spirit in which people gave, though, than with the amount raised. "God loves a cheerful giver," was not just an upbeat slogan. It was a serious call to check why they gave. "They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure," he said. Paul didn't invent that idea. In Exodus, the words about offerings to build the desert tabernacle was, "Receive my gift offerings from everyone who freely wants to give." Then Paul wrote in verse 8, "God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace," and "You will be made rich in every way," in verse 11. Paul, a traveling preacher who owned, as far as we know, no real estate, no life insurance policy, and no retirement plan, wrote about having more than enough!



Have you ever given something reluctantly or under compulsion, in a way that made you feel bitter? What was that experience like? For what reasons would God want us to give from free, grateful hearts without coercion or pressure? Have you ever given that way? If so, how was that different from giving under pressure?



In verse 15, Paul exclaimed, "Thank God for his gift that words can't describe!" What gift was he talking about? When (if ever) have you received a gift from someone that words couldn't fully describe, that "left you speechless"? How would you compare that kind of experience with God's freely given gift which Paul described?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me give my time, talents, and treasure, in a way that makes me better and not bitter. Open my eyes to the abundance you provide around me. May my heart sing as, out of your abundance, I seek to be your physical presence to the people in my world. Amen.*