

DRAMATIZED
Bible stories
ON THE TOPIC OF
ATTITUDES TOWARDS WEALTH

When Less Is More

Topic Overview

An Introduction to Attitudes Towards Wealth

The Bible talks a lot about wealth and money. In these lessons on Attitudes Towards Wealth we will learn and discuss what is a healthy attitude towards money and wealth and what is a dangerous attitude to have. There are clearly instances in the Bible where God has bestowed wealth to individuals. Abraham, Isaac, Job, Solomon, David, and Joseph (the son of Jacob) are some of the more popular individuals.

Before we dig into our lessons let us consider the following questions. It is up to your group leader to decide to talk about these now or to just be thinking about these over the next few weeks.

- 1) Are there dangers associated with being wealthy? If so, what are they?
- 2) Is money the root of evil? Explain your answer.
- 3) Can you name any non-Christians that are wealthy?

What is their general attitude towards life and others?

Do they appear to be happy?

- 4) Can you name any Christians that are wealthy?

If yes, how do you think they maintain a balance between serving God and managing their wealth?

Do they appear generous?

Before The Story

- 1) Can you name anyone in your community that is wealthy? Who are they and what, occupationally, did they do to become wealthy?
- 2) How do you measure wealth?
- 3) Who created the standards we use to measure wealth?
- 4) Is wealth measured universally? For example, do all workers earn the same pay for the same job? If I work for a day in an automobile factory in the United States will I earn the same pay as I would if I worked a day in an automobile factory in India or the Philippines? Explain your answer.

The Story

When Less Is More

Based on Mark 12:42-44

Then there was this time we were at Temple. Jesus actually went up front and sat in a chair next to the offering box and was watching people put their money into the offering. No pressure this Sabbath day's offering. We all lined up to put our offering in the box. We had some pretty big givers in our Temple and I'm sure they were happy to show off and let Jesus see them put a lot of money in the offering.

As the line moved forward there was a growing gap in the line. There was an elderly lady with a cane that couldn't keep up with the pace everyone was walking. She slowly made her way to the front. She drew attention to herself because of her inability to keep the offering line moving. As she approached the offering, she extended her thin frail weak hand over the box. Then she turned her hand over, face down, opened it and dropped two small copper coins into the offering.

"That's it?", I thought, "Those two coins added together weren't even worth a single penny? What a waste of time."

I could even hear a couple of the other temple members laugh and snicker at her pittance of gift.

As she walked by me, back to her seat, Jesus motioned us over to him. "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more money into the offering than anyone else here."

Maybe Jesus wasn't paying attention. I just saw some pretty large amounts put into the offering box with my own eyes. I think the temple will really benefit from those donations. And this, this little old widow lady didn't even give a penny. How in the world could he think she gave more than anyone else? I'm pretty sure she gave way LESS than anyone else.

Then Jesus continued, "All these rich people - they gave a portion of what they had - a small fraction of their total worth. They gave to the temple what they could afford to give without it greatly, if at all, affecting their standard of living."

"This women, this lovely woman, gave EVERYTHING she had into that offering box. Not some of her money, not what was left over after taking care of herself. That was all the money she had to live on!"

After The Story

- 1) If the woman in the story was a widow here is what it meant:
 - She was living alone
 - She had no children to support her
 - She had no husband to support her
 - There were no relatives to take care of her

How do you think she survived from day to day?

- 2) Write how you feel about the following paragraph:

This lady didn't even save any money to buy a piece of bread for dinner that night. She trusted God with all she had. And she trusted that he would take care of her needs. God was her first commitment in life. She didn't just say it - she lived it.

- 3) Do you think God expects us to give away everything we own? Why or why not?

4) Do you think Jesus was disappointed by the larger offerings the other Temple members gave? Explain your answer?

5) Did Jesus condemn those that gave larger offerings? What evidence do you have to support your answer?

6) What are some ways we can give everything to God?

7) What kind of faith is needed to trust God completely?

8) How much does our attitude have an affect on how we give?

9) Why do you think Mark put this story in the Bible?

10) What can we learn from this story and how can we apply it to our lives?

Topic Review

Intended to be used after reading the following three lessons:
Camels and Needles, When Less is More, and My Pal “Short Stack”.

1) Which of the three stories had the biggest impact on you? Why?

2) At the beginning of this series we mention wealthy people from the Bible, but they were all from the Old Testament. Does the Bible mention any wealthy Christians in the New Testament?

If you answered “no”, why don’t you think there are any wealthy Christians in the New Testament?

If you answered “yes”, can you name any? What makes you think they were wealthy?

3) Are there changes you need to make in your life so that your attitude towards wealth stays in check?

If so, what are they?

How can you accomplish those changes?

Leader's Discussion Notes

Topic Overview

An Introduction to Attitudes Towards Wealth

Typically, throughout this book most of the questions will be answered. While I may not have answered them in the introduction, the key questions will be answered before the end of the book.

More Biblically educated Christians may already know the answers to some of the questions in the introduction or even many of the questions relating to the different dramatizations. What we really want throughout this book is to allow for some self-discovery. Don't feed your students all the answers, allow them to struggle with them, especially the more difficult questions.

Figuring out a solution on your own holds a higher rate of information retention than just being told an answer. Hopefully we have included enough information, including backgrounds and context to help even the more educated students to have their own "ah ha!" moments.

It may also be a good idea to leave a question or two unanswered until your next meeting time. This allows students time to process what they have learned and try to figure out how to apply that information on their own. Just say something simple like "Let's think about this question some more and get back to it next week."

For those of you that can't stand having questions unanswered - this is for you... Don't share the answers to the first two questions with your students yet. They will come up again in later lessons.

- 1) A wealthy person can begin to rely on their ability to gain wealth for themselves. They can begin to think their success is based on what they are doing and not what God is allowing them to do. They stop relying on God because they have relied on themselves.

Greed and pride are also two very difficult habits or personality traits to overcome.

- 2) Money is not the root of evil. The love of money is. Money in and of itself is not a good or bad thing - it's just an object. It is how the wealth is viewed that can lead to a poor character flaw in an individual.

The answers to the next two questions are sharable with your students. These are just some starting names. To make the list more relevant to your group you may want to add more or different names.

- 3) At the time of the writing of this book names might include Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, various music artists, movie stars, or professional athletes.
- 4) At the time of the writing of this book names might include Billy Graham (evangelist), Chris Pratt (actor), Tom Hanks (actor), Faith Hill (musician), Chuck Norris (actor), and Carrie Underwood (musician, actress).

A quick Google search on “Christian celebrities” should allow you to find people most relevant to students in your group.

Leader's Discussion Notes

Before The Story

1) Answers for this will vary. If students can not name anyone in their community feel free to broaden the question to "people of fame" such as movie stars, professional athletes, businessmen or politicians.

2) By the world's standards it is measured by the monetary value of all your assets.

"Biblical wealth may be defined as the ability to experience and enjoy God's blessings. The poor individual who knows God as Savior has indescribable wealth compared to the rich one who rejects Him. Friendship, godly wisdom, and a happy home are invaluable." (GlobalChristiaCenter.com - an article on money management)

3) Allow your students to discuss the answers before moving on. Paying attention to their answer may help determine sources they are getting some of their information from that they live by. No one created the standards. The standards are also subjective based on what you perceive to be wealthy.

4) It is not. As far as a monetary value goes. Almost every country has a different value for the dollar based on that county's debt to asset ratio. Also. different societies have different levels of rich and poverty. Most Americans live like royalty compared to the average person living in a 3rd world country.

Leader's Discussion Notes

After The Story

NOTE:

This story in Mark has a two-fold application. In this lesson we are focusing on the widow and her trust in and reliance on God to take care of her.

But there is a flip side to this. Part of the responsibility of the temple was to help care for widows and orphans. (Isaiah 1:17, ...learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. There are many other references in the Bible. This is just one.) Jesus is not just praising this women for what she has given but he is also admonishing those that should/could be giving more.

Why would this widow, an individual that should be a recipient of these gifts, feel the need to supply the funds to take care of others? Clearly, there were many in that synagogue more capable of supply financial assistance to those in need other than her.

It's not just "Are you trusting God with everything he has blessed you with?", but are you also following the instructions he has given you on how to take care of those he places around you?

[End of note]

- 1) She had to rely on God and the mercy and kindness of others to take care of her.
- 2) Discuss what it means to fully trust God.
- 3) Pay attention to Mark 12:43. Jesus comments that the widow has put in all she has - but he does not commend or praise her for that action.

Jesus' big concern in this story is that the wealthy would allow a poor person to become more destitute in order to keep the "system" moving forward. The system referring to the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple in this case. Clearly those that had more could have contributed more so that this widow would not have had to contribute anything.

- 4) I don't think Jesus was disappointed by the amount they were giving (large or small quantities). I think he was disappointed by the fact they were giving from their excess. The amount they were giving did not affect their higher quality of life (life of abundance). And, as stated above, it did not cover the needs of the Temple forcing individuals of a lower income to have to bear that burden.
- 5) Jesus does not straight out condemn the richer people for their actions. But he makes it clear that, while not illegal, their actions are not moral.
- 6) You may want to start with a discussion about what it means to give everything to God. Allow your students to struggle with that question for a while. Giving everything to God does not mean that we put all our possessions in the offering plate but it does mean that we allow God to have control over our possessions. Possessions that he enabled us to earn in the first place. (Refer to Camels and Needles, Before the Story, Question 3 Answer)
- 7) The simple answer is complete faith. It is easy to give that response in a youth group or Sunday school setting. Talk about the reality of trying to live that out. What obstacles might you face and how would you overcome them?
- 8) Allow students to discuss this and give their reasons for their answers. After some discussion read Deuteronomy 15:10 and 2 Corinthians 9:7. Continue the discussion if these verses have brought new light into your answer.
- 9) I believe it has a two-fold purpose.
 - (1) See the answer to question 3. It was meant to reveal a flawed system put into place and practiced by people in high position at the Temple. People that should have known better than to take advantage of the poor and more importantly should have been taking care of the poor.
 - (2) I believe this story also shows the faith the widow has put in God to take care of her needs. Can you imagine doing something so spiritually significant that people would still be talking about it 2000 years from now?
- 10) Discuss ways you can take care of the poor and needy in your community. Try not to suggest ideas that are so big they will not be attainable. If you live in a metropolitan area supplying shelter to all the homeless in your city is a task that even the government is having a hard time doing. But an attainable goal may be to volunteer at a homeless shelter one afternoon a month.

Discuss ways we can effectively limit our spending. For adults, do you need to eat out as much as you do? Do you need to go to the movies and concerts as much as you do? Do you really need cable or satellite TV? The monthly bills for that may not seem that big but many cable bills are close to \$2000 a year!

If you are younger. Do you need the name brand clothes? Do you need to buy the newest video games? (Could you buy one copy and share it among friends - and I am not referring to making pirated or bootleg copies). Do you need to be in all the sports, plays, concerts or other extra curricular activities that you are in? Can you limit what you participate in so that it will help your parents financially or even give you time to work part-time to assist with expenses around the house?

Leader's Discussion Notes

Topic Review

Intended to be used after reading the following three lessons:
Camels and Needles, When Less is More, and My Pal "Short Stack".

- 1) Listening to what stories your students choose and why may give you some insight either into their current living situation or the values in life. You may get an unexpected answer such as, "I related to the story When Less is More because I feel like the widow." Or "My dad owns a finance company and doesn't go to church." I feel like my family might fit into the Camels and Needles story." While the question was meant for personal reflection you never know what a student might give for an answer.

Be prepared for surprises. Be prepared not to be judgmental. Be prepared to show compassion and encouragement. Be prepared to follow up with a student outside of the classroom. If a student feels like the widow, a study session, in front of peers, might not be the best place to explore why - especially if they come from a broken home or a family living off government assistance.

- 2) Yes, the Bible does mention wealthy Christians in the New Testament. Here is a list of some of them that gave generously to those in need.

- Joseph, called Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37)
- Dorcas (Acts 9:36)
- Cornelius (Acts 10:1)
- Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6-12)
- Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)
- Jason (Acts 17:5-9)
- Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3)
- Mnason of Cyprus (Acts 21:16)
- Philemon (Philemon 1)

These people lived faithful Christian lives in addition to enjoying wealth. Note the example they set: they were wealthy AND they gave generously. Throughout their actions they lived out the responsibility placed on their lives that came with the wealth.

Peter Parker's (Spider-Man) Uncle Ben once told him, "Along with great power comes great responsibility". The same can be said for someone that God has entrusted with wealth. Along with great wealth comes great responsibility. Wealth is not just

to take care of you and your family. It is a gift that comes with the responsibility to help take care of others.

- 3) Hopefully everyone has learned they need to change at least a little bit throughout this lesson series. If not, that is okay. It is quite possible that some students just do not think about wealth at this point in their lives. For them, we are planting seeds for future growth and responsibility.

For the students that recognize they need or want to change, help them verbalize clearly what they would like to change. Help them develop a plan of action.

While there are many good additional resources, I would recommend Compass Ministries (<https://compass1.org>). They specialize on money matters using Biblical principles.