

**Pastor Madelynne Lindsey**

**November 11, 2018**

**What Can You Give? Mark 12:38-44**

Let us pray: Dear God, make us more sensitive, more compassionate, and more loving towards the neighbor whom he puts on our path. And, grant the Word you speak this day may take root in our hearts, and bear fruit to your honor and glory, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I read a story of a woman who had finished her shopping and returned to her car to find four men inside it. She dropped her shopping bags, drew a handgun from her purse, and with a forceful voice said, "I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car!" Those men did not wait for a second invitation. They got out and ran like crazy!

The woman, understandably shaken, quickly loaded her shopping bags and got into the car. She just wanted to get out of there as fast as she could. But no matter how she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition.

Then it hit her: This isn't my car! She looked, and indeed her car was parked four or five spaces away. She got out, looked around to see if the men were near, loaded the bags into her own car, and drove to the police station to turn herself in.

The desk sergeant, after hearing her story, nearly fell out of his chair laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four men were reporting a carjacking by a woman with glasses and curly white hair, less than five feet tall, and carrying a large handgun. No charges were filed (*Greg Laurie, A Time to Worship, Decision, Nov. 2001.*)

She thought it was her car, but it really belonged to someone else. The truth is: God owns everything. He owns that lady's car and the one she mistakenly got into. And He owns everything we call "ours." He owns it all.

Joel sent word to Greta that he did not have anyone to speak about stewardship today, so I will talk to you today about that ever-dreaded sermon topic, money. I would like to tell you that I'm going to sugar-coat today's sermon and make it easy to swallow so that we can all leave here feeling good about ourselves.

But if we are going to be honest, really honest, about why giving matters, I have to talk about what can you give? And the matter of giving and generosity can't be sugar-coated because ultimately, when it's all boiled down, our giving reflects directly on our relationship with God.

God's mandates about giving are clear, and Jesus' teachings about money and the poor number second only to his teachings about the kingdom of God.

For all the uncertainty about the meaning behind certain themes and passages in the Bible, the message about our obligation to give to God from our first fruits is clear. Here, with matters of money, is one of our greatest opportunities to follow God's commands and to reflect the generosity of Christ.

Let's examine the word steward. When you go to a hotel, you might give your bags to a steward who takes them to your room, but they are not his bags. You entrust your bags and their safekeeping to him for a short period of time. The foundational principle of stewardship is that God is the owner of all.

So, what does that say about our relationship to the owner and the stuff entrusted to us? Well, it says that God is the owner and I am the manager.

Everything I have today comes from God. It is His; I own nothing. David said that "the world and everything in it" belongs to God (Psalm 89:11). I am not the owner of the things in my life; as a steward, I am merely the manager.

If I believe that I am the owner, then I am constantly going to be in conflict with God over what I do with the things that I have. But when I understand that the Lord is the owner, and I am only the manager, the conflict disappears, and freedom overtakes my life.

Let's take a test right here to make sure we all understand. If you made \$400 last week, and you have come to church on Sunday, how much of that \$400 belongs to God? All of it: \$400. Someone might say, "Let me see, 10 percent of \$400 - that's \$40!" No, the principle of tithing does not mean \$40 is God's, and the rest is yours. It all belongs to God.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 cautions, "You may say to yourself, 'My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,' but remember that the Lord your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm His covenant He swore to your fathers, as it is today."

If God is the owner, then I am the manager whom He has trusted with His property. I must learn to think, therefore, like His manager. A manager oversees the owner's assets for the owner's benefit. A manager carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he or she manages.

The job of a manager is to find out what the owner wants done with His assets and then to carry out His will. This understanding affects how we give. In every age, God's people struggle to find the words to speak about the stewardship of money.

And though Jesus speaks directly and often about the dangers of allowing money to take the place of God in our lives, people of faith often find such words difficult and awkward.

On the one hand, thoughtful Christians want to be known as kind and generous people; on the other hand, becoming such a person is not exactly second nature to many of us.

For this reason, I believe, Jesus takes an opportunity in the passage before us to point out an unlikely person--a poor widow--as an example of what God values most in the stewardship of our money. I want to suggest that what Jesus values in this woman are a *Genuine Heart, a Grateful Spirit, and a Generous Attitude*.

Jesus and his disciples were in the temple area near the treasury. From their vantage point, they could see what people were putting into the offering plates. Some of the wealthy folks were putting in large sums of money.

These large sums and the people giving them do not impress Jesus at all. Then along comes a poor widow, who catches the attention of Jesus. The poor widow gives from a genuine heart. In the previous verses, Jesus finds himself in a debate with the religious leaders.

Jesus turns to his disciples and points out the way that these same religious leaders like to be seen in their long robes--it's an impressive display of their authority.

He condemns the way they use their positions of influence to their advantage, like getting the best seats in the house in the synagogue and the seats of honor at banquets. In essence, he is saying that their hearts contain the wrong motives--they are out to make themselves look good in the sight of others--first and foremost!

In contrast to them, Jesus sees the poor widow and says, "That's what I'm after!" Her motives are pure. She clearly gives out of a genuine heart for God. Although her gift is meager in comparison to the large sums given by the wealthy, it is by far the greater gift, because it comes from her heart.

I want to suggest that the place to begin in our giving is to examine our hearts. Do we desire to give God the very best that we have, from all that we have?

Several years ago, a Kenyan woman joined a church. Her name was Lydia. She loved her congregation, but she really missed certain aspects of her home church, especially parts of the worship service.

The pastor asked her what she missed the most, and she said, "I miss the offering. In Kenya, we would sometimes dance down the aisles during the offering. We didn't have much to give, but what we did have we gave with much joy. What a privilege to give back to God!" she said.

Now, I am not going to ask you to dance down the isles, however, if you want to, I wouldn't stop you, but, I will ask you to try to link the offering of your gifts with the attitude of your hearts. As God has given so much to us, especially in and through his son Jesus Christ, surely we can give back to God from glad and joyful hearts!

If the Owner called you to give an accounting today, what would the record say about your giving? Would it reflect a humble belief that you are only managing what He owns?

Would joy mark your life as one who gives generously because you know your investment is gaining heavenly treasure for you? Some of us need to rethink how we're spending our resources for Christ and His kingdom.

The white-haired lady was mistaken as she went to the wrong car, wielded a gun, and sent the passengers scurrying. But hers was an honest mistake. It wasn't her car. And she wasn't held accountable for her actions. But we will be held accountable. All that we call "ours" is actually His. My prayer is that we will properly manage what He has entrusted to us.

May God bless us in this season of our lives, with those very characteristics that are pleasing to Jesus in the stewardship of our money: a genuine heart, a grateful spirit, and a generous attitude --to the glory of God! Amen.

Let us pray: Loving and gracious God, thank you for the many blessings that you pour out upon us. Help us to remember these blessings each and every day of our lives. As we give our financial gifts to you, may our gifts be pleasing to you and may they accomplish your purpose in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

