



Imagine
what **GOD**
will **do**

A series of four Bible
studies on living as
Christian managers



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TEACHING GUIDE

IMAGINE WHAT GOD WILL DO

INTRODUCTION FOR ADULT TEACHERS:

Let me begin by thanking you for your willingness to set aside your regular curriculum materials so that your class can participate in this special series of lessons. We hope and pray that this series of Bible studies will be relevant and enable us to see stewardship of life as a discipleship issue.

This packet contains lesson plans for four consecutive Sundays. We have given you more ideas than you can use in any one session. Choose the ones you feel will make the greatest impact in your class. Feel free to create your own lesson ideas, too.

Our sincere gratitude is expressed to Reverend Terry Maples, Associate Pastor for Discipleship at Huguenot Road Baptist Church, for sharing these lessons with us. Terry wrote these a few years ago for use by Huguenot Road Baptist Church adult Bible study classes. He is a gifted and generous Christian educator.

I'm looking forward to this series of Bible studies. I'm convinced that these four lessons address areas of struggle for the members of our congregation. These are areas where we need to grow and mature, and you can help facilitate that growth experience through your leadership. May God richly bless you as you prepare yourself for this journey of faith!

James Flammig, Pastor

ADULT LESSON PLAN #1

MANAGING GOD'S GIFT OF LIFE!

Adult Teacher Preparation Time:

Who is a Steward?

Every person who walks on the earth today is a steward. Some are good stewards—caring, careful, attentive, thoughtful, compassionate, committed and generous. Unfortunately, some are poor stewards—careless, wasteful, thoughtless, inconsiderate, self-centered, and hurtful. As Christians, we are called to be good stewards of life.

Our stewardship decisions can have long-lasting consequences. If we pour used oil into a drainage ditch, waters will be polluted and wildlife will suffer. If we throw our trash out the window of our car, the earth will be dirty. Decisions to care for God's creation are driven by our understanding of stewardship.

Of course, the biggest decision we make regarding stewardship of life is whether or not to give God control of our lives. Failure to make Christ the Lord of our lives has eternal consequences. Failure to use the spiritual gifts God has entrusted to our care has eternal consequences.

The Bible and Stewardship

The Bible can stimulate both faith and practice because it represents God's point of view on many issues. For those who search, the Bible has much to say about who God is, what God wants, how we can be partners, and what we should do with what God has entrusted to us.

Biblical stewardship flows from God's side of the relationship between the Creator and the created order. The Bible tells of a partnership between God and Christian stewards working together for the good of creation.

As we begin this study together, keep these points in mind:

1. The Bible informs us about God's point of view on the meanings and purpose of life.
2. The Bible gives us information about God's hopes and plans for all creation.
3. The Bible emphasizes that God is a God of hope.
4. From beginning to end, the Bible stresses the interrelationship of all aspects of creation.
5. The Bible gives us information about the role of the Christian steward as a partner in God's plans.

Concept of Ownership

The Bible is clear that God is owner of all that exists. According to Paul, we don't even own ourselves (1 Corinthians 6:19). Everything we are or have has been given to us by God.

For additional biblical thoughts on the concept of ownership, see the following passages: Psalm 50:10-11, Psalm 89:11-12, Leviticus 25:23, Ezekiel 18:4, Matthew 6:33, Acts 16:17, Romans 14:8.

Stewardship is Entrusting

God is the One who entrusts to us. In Genesis 1:26-31, God says, "Let humankind be good stewards over the fish of the sea and of the sea itself, over the birds of the air and the air itself, over the cattle of the field and the soil itself, over all the earth itself, and over every creeping thing that creeps on and inside the earth" (free translation). At no point do we read that God gives us title to anything. God continues to own everything, but God entrusts us with creation.

Stewardship is Care-Managing

When we talk about biblical stewardship, we normally talk about managing what God has given us, but the notion of care is a critical part of being a steward. The extra ingredient that distinguishes care-managing from managing is passion—a special devotion, emotional involvement, and zeal.

God has expectations of care-managers. The Bible suggests that care managers are to be watchful and alert (Luke 12:37), trustworthy (1 Corinthians 4:2), and blameless (Titus 1:7). Care-managers reflect what God values most. Christian care-managers are God's presence in the world.

Stewardship is Confronting

The word confront means "to come face to face with." This is actually a positive word even though it has gotten a bad rap. Once the Christian has been entrusted with something and is actively involved in care-managing, confrontation naturally takes place. The New Testament constantly confronts us regarding priorities in life. We are brought "face to face" with the reality that God is our only true source of happiness—not bank accounts or lottery winnings. Confrontation is a natural part of Christian stewardship.

Lesson Presentation Suggestions:

1. Today we begin a spiritual journey together at First Baptist Church. During this journey, we will traverse some terrain we've encountered before. We'll look at familiar subjects through different lenses, hopefully! And just maybe some new habits will be formed. Parts of this journey will be easy for you—you've already mastered the biblical principles being taught. Other parts of the journey may be quite difficult for you depending on where you are in your spiritual growth.
2. To help class members assess what they currently think about biblical stewardship, write the following words on a poster board or chalkboard or copy them for each participant (see Exercise 1). If you have class members work individually, have them circle all words they believe have some connection with biblical stewardship. If you use a board, have participants come forward and circle words they associate with biblical stewardship.

possessions	money	tithing
ownership	laws	power
freedom	soil	church collections
home	management	salaries
riches	rules	environment
poverty	sharing	responsibility
employment	buying things	recycling
God's rules	managing something	love
the world	for someone else	joy
gifts	tax breaks	disposable income
time	the poor	grace
justice	talents	life

3. Ask why specific words were chosen, then state that all these words in one way or another may be associated with biblical stewardship. Stewardship encompasses all of life. (What we're trying to help class members to see is that stewardship is not just about money and possessions—it's a much broader issue.)
4. Ask the following question: "When it comes to biblical stewardship, what is the foundational principle?" ANSWER: God is owner of all things!
5. Ask: "If God is owner of all things, then what is man's relationship to all that God has created?" ANSWER: God owns; we manage what God has entrusted to our care.
6. We get our understanding of this foundational principle from the Bible. Divide the class into three groups and have each group discuss the connection between the scripture and biblical stewardship. If you prefer, you could discuss one passage at a time.
PASSAGES: Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1; Haggai 2:8
7. Our tendency as human beings is to acknowledge God's control in certain parts of our lives while preserving areas where we maintain control. God is a jealous God and wants total control over our lives (all aspects). Have class members look at the listing of areas for which we are responsible on p. 5 of the pupil material. Ask them to put a plus sign (+) beside the areas where they are presently taking their responsibility seriously. Have them put a minus sign (-) beside areas where they struggle to relinquish control to God. Ask each person to

- share with a friend how they felt about that exercise. Are there other areas of responsibility you would add to the list?
8. Ask the question: "Why is the issue of ownership so important for the Christian?" Almost every Christian would readily acknowledge that God is owner of all that exists. The problem is that we really don't believe it. Yes, we will give God the oceans, the mountains, and the plains. But when it comes to "our" wallets, homes, cars, clothes—well, that's a different subject. We practice an ownership that we didn't get from God—we created it for ourselves. Without the understanding that God is owner, not us, we will never be able to understand the need for accountability to God. If we own, we are in control (that spells trouble). If God owns and we manage, God is in control (that's freeing).
 9. Compare and contrast the "Ownership Model" and the "Biblical Stewardship Model" on p. 6. Is this a fair comparison? Must we choose between one or the other? Can we be Christian and live as if we follow the ownership model? If so, what does that do to our relationship to God? NOTE: You could use the models as a matching game. Beginning with what the world tells us (ownership model), see if members can come up with the proper (biblical model) perspective.
 10. As Christians, do we have responsibility to hold each other accountable for how we manage our lives under the Lordship of Christ? If so, how can we do so without judging? If not, what is the proper relationship between members of a congregation?
 11. The thrust of this lesson is that a crucial part of Christian discipleship is recognition of God's ownership of everything that exists. That recognition begins with an understanding that our very lives belong to God. How we invest our lives shows whether or not we really believe that God is owner and that we manage life for God. When we acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, we invest our lives in kingdom causes.
 12. Close with the Lord's Prayer. Have class members think about the words!

EXERCISE 1

Circle each of the following words that you associate with biblical stewardship:

possessions

money

tithing

ownership

laws

power

freedom

soil

church collections

home

management

salaries

riches

rules

environment

poverty

sharing

responsibility

employment

buying things

recycling

the world

love

joy

gifts

tax breaks

disposable income

time

the poor

grace

justice

talents

life

God's rules

managing something
for someone else

ADULT LESSON PLAN #2 MANAGING GOD'S GIFT OF TIME

Teacher Preparation Time:

PERSPECTIVES ON TIME

"All my possessions for a moment in time." (last words of Queen Elizabeth I)

"Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that's the stuff life is made of."

(Ben Franklin)

"Time is the measure of experience in eternity." (Ernest Holmes)

"A man who wastes one hour of time has not discovered the meaning of life." (Charles Darwin)

"The best way to use time is to work it to death." (R.G. LeTourneau)

"Sit by the road until your soul catches up with your body." (Ancient African wisdom)

"To consider time as a mere resource, like natural gas or chromium, is to see it as limited and subject to 'running out.' If we want to use it better, we must speed up the rhythm of life, since it comes to us only in measured quantities. 'Redeeming' time comes to mean 'gaining' time that is, squeezing more out of it; and life becomes compressed and breathless. To think of time as a gift instead of a resource does not mean that we should treasure it less or be careless with it. Rather, we should try to respect the wishes of the Giver by the way we use it." (William McConnell - missionary and professor in Brazil)

"Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Louis Pasteur, Leonardo da Vinci, Mother Teresa, Michelangelo, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein." (H. Jackson Brown)

"Time wasted is existence; used is life." (Edward Young)

Read what the preacher had to say about time in Eccl. 3:1-11.

EXPLORING OTHER SCRIPTURES ON TIME

Luke 12:13-21

James 4:13-17

1 Peter 4:7-11

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR RELATING TO TIME

1. We must not cling to the past (2 Corinthians 5:17).
2. We must not ignore the past (Isaiah 46:9-10).
3. We cannot find our way to the future apart from some reflection on the past. This keeps us from repeating the mistakes of the past.
4. As we look into the future, we must not be overconfident of our own strength to determine our destinies (Luke 12:19-20).
5. We must not allow ourselves to be crippled by our concerns for our future well-being (Matthew 6:25, 27).
6. We should not be careless about how we approach the future (Luke 14:28).
7. We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we know that the future lies in the hands of God.

EXERCISE

You have been hired by God to write a three line statement explaining how God wants you to use the gift of time. What would that statement be?

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

Many people who begin to see that their lives are out of control decide to eliminate activities. Some people I know eliminate church attendance and spiritual disciplines first. What would you say to these people? Remember: "We invest in what we value!"

NOTE: In a recent survey of people who reported that they did not exercise because they didn't have enough time, it was found that the average respondent watched three hours of television per day.

HYMN FOR EMPHASIS

"Take Time to Be Holy" #446

"I Need Thee Every Hour" #450

Lesson Presentation Suggestions:

1. Have you ever heard: "Life is too short. God should have known we would want to live longer." That sentiment is echoed by a contemporary song writer who says: *We're barely young, and then...we're old!* Do you agree with this perspective on life and time? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe that we would live our lives any differently (in terms of time management) if we understood earlier in life that life is short?
3. One of the most difficult tasks in life is managing the time given to us by God. It seems that everybody and every organization wants a piece of our time. Our family members expect us to spend quality time together. Schools and other not-for-profit organizations vie for volunteers who will give their time. Certainly, the church needs its members to invest time. From all the wonderful things in which we could invest our time, how do we prioritize what really reflects our values? (We'll try to answer this question as we proceed.) Let's see what the Bible has to say about the use of time.
4. Focus attention on the focal passages. Really, three passages are covered: Psalm 90:12, Luke 10:38ff, and Ephesians 5:15-16.
5. Read or have read Psalm 90:12 and ask the following questions:
 - a. What do you believe David means when he asks God to teach us to "number our days?"
 - b. Does Jo Berry capture the essence of what David was saying in her quote on top of page 8? (in the Learner's Commentary)
6. Tell the biblical story about Jesus, Mary, and Martha from Luke 10.
 - a. Contrast the priorities of Mary and Martha.
 - b. Why was Mary commended for her priorities? Why was Martha told that her priorities were misplaced?
 - c. Is there a message in this passage for us relative to spending time at the feet of Jesus before we establish our priorities?

7. Read Ephesians 5:15-16. Have class members discuss what it means to “redeem the time.” (See commentary on pp. 15-16)
8. To help class members find meaningful ways to prioritize their time, refer them to the advice by Jo Berry on p. 9. Discuss as necessary. An alternative to this approach would be to summarize the seven steps on the enclosed article. I believe that most of our members will resonate with the need to build margin into their lives!
9. Dialogue with member about the relationship between caring for our bodies and managing time. We are an integrated whole. Practicing habits like smoking, excessive drinking, long-term exposure to sun, a poor diet, unsafe sex habits, etc., present very real danger to our lives. To do these things potentially robs us of time here on earth—time that God wants us to invest here on earth. Stewardship includes care-managing our bodies.
10. How do we bring balance to our lives in the area of time management? It won’t happen without some intentional effort. Have class members complete Exercise 2. This exercise will help each person think about areas that are out of balance. NOTE: Balance means that we have time to do things for ourselves and our families, time to commune with God, and time to give to others.
11. Present the following case study:

The Myers family is suburban family with a father, a mother, and two children. Bob and Judy live fast-paced lives. Bob is an accountant for Crestar Bank, and Judy is an executive at James River. The children are equally busy. Bob, Jr. is always on the go with travel soccer, baseball, and ice hockey. Margie’s schedule is consumed with band, chorus, and basketball at school.

At a recent family dinner (which happens only once or twice per month), family members began discussing their priorities and the demands on their time. A part of their discussion centered around the fact that busy schedules had caused them to stop attending church services.

What advice would you offer this family? What will be necessary for them to prioritize the things they believe important—including nurturing faith?

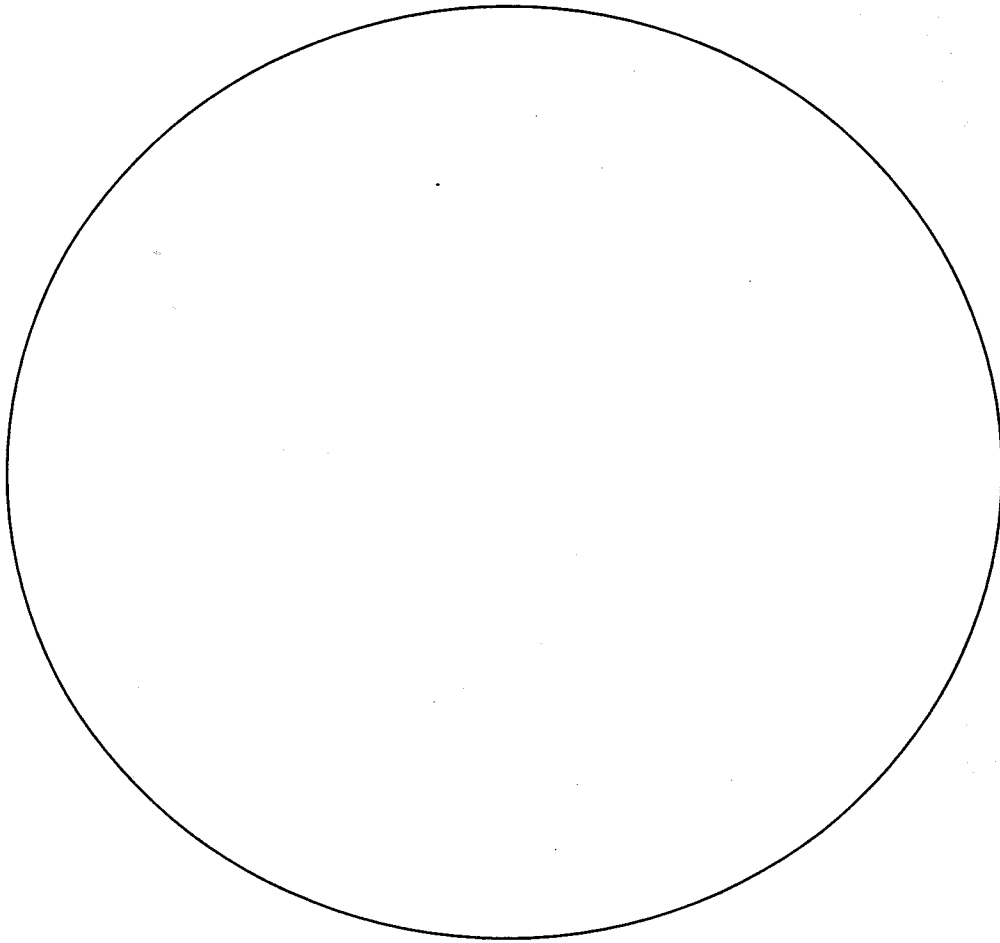
12. Ask: “Is it realistic for us to be asked to tithe our time?” With our hectic schedules, most of our people would probably choose to tithe their income (give 10%) to God rather than pledge to give God 10% of their time. If every Christian tithed his/her time (by spending time with God, studying the Bible, discipling others, and serving others), what would that do for the kingdom of God?
13. Have class member give some intentional energy this week to prioritizing their time. Have them complete Exercise 3 and bring it back with them next week.
14. Close with the following prayer:

God of all time—past, present, and future—help us remember that you have given exactly the same number of hours in the day to each one of us, and that these hours are precious and unique. Once lost, they can never be reclaimed. Teach us to be good and faithful stewards of the time that you so graciously grant us. Show us the value of each passing moment, that we might use each one wisely and well. Be proud of our efforts to make the most of each day, and forgive those occasions when we are guilty of wasting time. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen!

EXERCISE #2

Reflecting on a Day

In the circle below, create and label a pie chart to indicate how you spent your time one day last week. Choose a day that best reflects how you invest your time.



Does your pie chart indicate that your management of time is in balance? Did you allow time for God, for yourself, for your family, for your church? What areas need to change to bring you back into balance?

ADULT LESSON PLAN #3 MANAGING GOD'S GIFT OF TALENTS

Lesson Presentation Suggestions:

1. Not all gifts are created equal. Some of us remember the wedding shower gift-giving ritual. Did you happen to receive multiple versions of the same gift. Normally, what would have been an exciting gift makes the second, third, and fourth duplicates less than useful. All gifts are good, but some are more useful than others. One thing we can be sure of is that any gift that has been given to us by God is useful—it has a purpose. It won't have to go back to the store!
2. Ask these reflection questions: Do you believe that God would call us as a church to do something without giving the gifts needed to accomplish it? Do you think that God would gift gifts to people and not expect them to use them?
3. I think it would be a nasty trick for God to lead First Baptist Church to engage in a specific ministry without providing people with the necessary gifts to make it happen. Likewise, God would not give gifts to certain Christians and not expect them to put those gifts to work to build up the body of Christ, the church.
4. Have someone read the focal passage: Matthew 25:14-30.
5. Let class members know that a talent in this passage is a sum of money, but the principle of ownership and management applies to spiritual gifts and talents.
6. Ask: What does the owner of the talents expect from the servants? (investment of the talents in a productive way)
7. Ask: What is the result of investing talents for God? (use them wisely, and God will give you more talents) God sees you are capable and competent in that you have wisely used the gifts previously given to you. As a result, God will endow you with additional gifts for ministry.
8. Ask: Was the owner justified in treating the servant who had buried his master's talent in such a harsh way? (parable indicates that God is owner and has a right to expect a return on investment)
9. Ask: Do we really believe that God expects us to be that accountable with the gifts God has entrusted to our care? Are we justified in not investing our gifts because we are so busy or because we are afraid to fail or because we are falsely humble?
10. Make certain that class members recognize that spiritual gifts have been given to each of us to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13). These gifts are to glorify God, not the one to whom they have been entrusted. These gifts are the means that God has chosen to empower the local church. Without members investing their spiritual gifts at First Baptist Church, our church would die. The gifts must be used for sacred purposes. What does that mean?
11. Our purpose here is not to get into a thorough study of spiritual gifts. Rather, our objective is to heighten the awareness of each member that he/she has a gift or multiple gifts to invest. Failure to "employ" our gifts is the same as digging a hole in the ground and burying them. As we learned in the passage of scripture, God is quite displeased when we hoard the gifts that He has freely given. Conversely, God is glorified and the Good News is shared when we take seriously our responsibility to employ our gifts within a faith community.

Matth. 25:
14-30

Eph.
4:12-13

12. Provide the following list of spiritual gifts to class members. Encourage each member to identify at least one gift that he/she has been given by God. Many will be able to identify more than one. Have them think about how well they are investing that gift for God. Would God be pleased with the return on investment?

Romans 12:6-8	prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, compassion
1 Corinthians 12:4-11	wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues
1 Corinthians 12:28	apostleship, prophecy, teaching, miracles, healing, helping, leadership, speaking in tongues
Ephesians 4:11	apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoral skills, teaching

If class members know one another really well, spend some time affirming the gifts that you see in one another. Be sensitive to those who have not been affirmed.

14. Do you believe that each person who becomes a member of First Baptist Church does so for a reason? Does God call specific people to unite with our congregation because they have unique ministry gifts, which we need?
15. Have class members respond to the quote by Erma Bombeck on page 14.
16. Don't hide your gifts and talents. Give God a good return on God's investment!
17. Close with prayer.

LESSON PLAN #4

MANAGING GOD'S GIFT OF MONEY

Teacher Preparation:

ACCOUNTABILITY AND LIFE

What happens if we as Christians accept the principle that we are accountable to God as stewards of God's gifts to us? Accepting this principle of accountability brings significance to one's life. It adds a sense of urgency, of mission, of destiny. It means that a person who once thought of himself as rather insignificant now sees himself as a partner with God. His life now gains purpose and direction. He now handles with care each treasure in the package of life. Each day has new meaning, each thought new potential, each dollar new power, each opportunity new possibilities!

ACCOUNTABILITY AND MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

We cannot understand the concept of stewardship of money until we acknowledge God's ownership and our accountability before God. This Sunday we focus on the dollar and cent features of stewardship. It is important to note that the proper handling of money alone does not qualify one as a good steward. Managing money is just one aspect of biblical stewardship.

A common error that needs to be corrected is identifying stewardship of money with liberal giving or tithing. As stewards, we are responsible to God for how we earn every cent, how we invest our resources—from the first penny earned to the disposition of our estate. In fact, God is concerned with at least six dimensions of stewardship of financial resources:

1. How do I earn my money?
2. What is my attitude toward the money I earn?
3. Why do I give my money?
4. How do I give my money?
5. How do I spend the portion I keep for myself?
6. How do I leave my money when I die?

PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD MONEY

Money is neither good nor evil. Money is amoral. It is capable of good and evil, depending on how it is used. Money is a harmless bit of green paper, the benefit or harm arising from its use.

God is concerned about our attitude toward money. In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul puts his finger on a sore spot—improper attitude toward money. To love money is the taproot of all kinds of sin.

What does it mean to love money? To love money is to believe that dollars and cents can unlock any door and buy any privilege. To love money is to put one's checkbook on a pedestal and go the limits of physical exhaustion or diabolical conniving to increase that account. To love money is to resort to dishonest means to get it. To love money means one will sacrifice family and individual happiness, peace of mind, and the finer virtues of life to acquire it. To love money means that one believes possessions determine the value of a person.

A lover of money is a materialist—one who allows this self-made god to become master of his life. His conduct, spending habits, and philosophy of life—all revolve around the securing and use of “things.” This person rules God out of his life. That’s why Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and money.” We must deal with the Christian’s attitude toward money first—it reflects priorities in life. Then we can deal with the issue of generous giving (a by-product of a proper attitude toward financial resources).

While we cannot serve God and money at the same time, we can serve God with the money entrusted to our care. A right attitude toward money is accepting it as a tool, a servant, an aid.

IMPORTANT GIVING PATTERNS:

1950s - 1970s, of each dollar given

20% gave 80 cents

30% gave 20 cents

50% gave nothing

1980s - 1990s, of each dollar given

12-16% gave 80 cents

29-33% gave 20 cents

more than 50% gave nothing

IMPORTANT STATISTIC:

Those 55 years of age and above give 80 cents of every dollar given.

Lesson Presentation Suggestions:

1. Begin with a game of popcorn. Read the list of items below and have members who have one of the items in their home to jump up and sit right down again. Read the list quickly. You can add items if you like.

television

Nintendo

calculator

answering machine

cordless phone

CD player

dishwasher

vacuum cleaner

microwave oven

VCR

DVD player

computer

Most of these items were not common just 30 years ago. A few of them are only a decade old. Not long ago, these were signs of privilege, but today these items are in the homes of many considered to be below the poverty line.

2. Do newspaper, magazine, or television advertisements display any concern for stewardship of money? (most make us feel like we have to have the item to be “with it”) As Christians, we have to discern between needs and wants if we are to manage wisely the financial resources God has entrusted to our care.

3. Fairy tales would have us believe that more possessions mean more happiness and that a person who does or produces more is more important. Do you believe either of these is true? Why or why not?
4. Let's see what Jesus has to say to us about money. Have someone read the focal passage: Matthew 6:19-34.
5. Make sure the following points from the story are covered: accumulating treasures on earth involves lots of risks, serving God and money is not possible (it's a loyalty issue), and only treasures stored in heaven last forever. What does that mean? How does that happen?
6. Ask class members, "Why do you think that there are so many cautions about money in the Bible." If we have money in this life, we get lulled into thinking that we are secure and that we've made it on our own. Money obscures our need for God in our lives.
7. Have class members recall the first lesson where we talked about ownership. Remind them that God owns all wealth on earth and that we are to manage what God has entrusted to our care.
8. Discuss the concept of "coined life." Do class members really believe that what they spend their money on they are investing their lives in?
9. Why do you think that Jesus seemed to be more concerned with the attitude with which one gives rather than the amount?
10. Discuss the concept of "firstfruits." Do we really believe that we are asked by God to give Him our first and best gifts? Do we really believe that if we give to God out of the leftovers (after bills are paid) that we evidence that God isn't very important in our lives?
11. Share the following key points about money and possessions from Dan Dick. See if class members agree:
 - Money and possessions are gifts from God.
 - Everything in creation really belongs to God; we merely use it.
 - Money is a tool, not a goal.
 - Charity is a sign of good stewardship.
 - "Stuff" is good, but it won't make us happy or fulfilled.
 - Money gives us the opportunity to serve God and neighbor.
 - We should possess things, but not let things possess us.
 - Stewardship does not mean doing *without*, it means *doing with integrity*.
 - Money is temporary, but God's love is eternal.
 - No one can serve two masters; no one can love both God and money.
12. Talk with class members regarding what they believe concerning tithing. Then share any of these comments you feel helpful: Tithing has often been misinterpreted. Many in the church view it as a legalistic requirement. Some consider it a burdensome duty rather than an opportunity for joyful expression of praise. Some view tithing as an investment, assuming that the more they give, the more they'll get. Some see tithing as proof of a salvation experience. Any of the above views can be problematic. We pervert the concept of the tithe if we imagine 10% to be a magic number that guarantees some kind of relationship with God. Legalistic requirements can quickly kill the spirit of gratitude that should be motivating us to give in the first place. Tithing is an expression of Christian grace. Tithing is a response, not a legalistic requirement. Growing toward a tithe and beyond can be a discipline that frees us to comprehend the fullness of the gospel and the riches of God's grace. Tithing, properly

understood, can be a vital step in Christian discipleship. Tithing is a discipleship issue, not a fund-raising device.

13. Do you believe that a tithe (10% of income) is an acceptable standard for those of us who live in an affluent society? Hear what Douglas Johnson had to say about this issue:

First, the tithe is not an appropriate standard for giving in an affluent society. The tithe is a rather easy rule to follow and, by following it, the more stringent demands of giving are ignored...Second, God's demands are far greater than the tithe, a 10% token of one's possessions. Third, the tithe, for an affluent Christian, holds no opportunity for sacrifice...The tithe in an affluent society is no more than a charitable contribution.

14. Brainstorm for just a few minutes what our church would be able to accomplish in our community and around the world if every member took seriously the biblical teachings regarding firstfruits (giving 10% or more off the top). Can you imagine the potential impact upon the kingdom of God?
15. The focus of the lesson today is on priorities. For most of us, our priorities will have to change if we are to invest generously in kingdom causes. Challenge class members to pray and think about how they need to reorder their priorities concerning the management of money in light of Jesus' teaching.
16. Close with prayer.