

PSALM 25: 4-5 "SHOW ME YOUR WAYS, O LORD" GROUP BIBLE STUDIES -
TEACHER'S PACKET - LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES

LESSON #1 – GOD'S WAY FOR GIVING

GOD'S WAY – Looking at the title of this lesson, the teacher may think, "there's nothing new here." Maybe. For twenty-five years, I've heard and preached sermons on time, talents and treasures. For twenty-five years I have seen my congregations increase their commitments, often dramatically. Even so, for twenty-five years it has always seemed that income never quite matched outgo, and work is left undone. This lesson, dealing with God's Way for giving may just reverse that trend.

THE PRAYER –Let us begin with prayer: Dear Lord, You know that money, in itself, is neither good nor bad. With money we can do good or evil. We can selfishly serve our own desires, or answer the cries of our neighbor. With money we can buy forbidden things or make it easier for someone else to live. Money brings power, and power is the ability to accomplish good or evil. Direct us, dear Lord, in your way for giving. We pray it in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

THE WORLD'S WAY – Our prayer correctly says that money is a tool. We can use it for God, or ourselves. Although most Christians try, none succeed, in serving two masters. That's what this story tells us: A middle aged man, whose hair began to turn gray, was dating two women at the same time. One of the ladies was young, and the other quite a bit older. The elder woman, ashamed to be seen with a man younger than herself, always pulled out some of her suitor's dark hairs. The younger lady, not wishing to be the wife of an old man, tried to remove every gray hair she could get her hands on. It wasn't long before the man was totally bald. He would have done better to pick one girl or the other. He couldn't have both. Christians should learn that lesson when it comes to God's way of giving. We can't serve two masters.

THOUGHT: Have you ever stopped to think that Christ never gave money to the needy who came to Him? The riches of the world were His to give away. Yet when the miserable masses came to Him, He didn't give them money. He gave Himself, completely. When our Savior walked this earth, He never tried to serve two masters. From the beginning of His life in Bethlehem, until the moment He breathed His last on the cross, He did His Father's business. There was no compromise, no question as to where He would put His resources. He had come to seek and save the lost. Everything else, that most of us count important, was secondary to our Lord. He did that which was necessary, gave that which was mandatory, for the rescuing of our souls.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH 1 – Of course there are many of us who might say, "Yes, but I'm not Jesus. I need to be more practical. After all, I've got to think of myself, my family and future." Most people agree with the statement: "Jesus never expected us to be as giving as He was." I wonder if that's true. Let's take a look at these passages and answer the questions which follow:

Matthew 10: 37	Who should come first in our affection?	Jesus, not family.
Luke 14: 33	What should we be willing to give up to follow Jesus?	Everything.
Luke 18: 28	Did Jesus ever ask anyone to give up everything? Who	Yes / Disciples
Matthew 19: 21-22	Anyone else?	Young man / Man left all
1 Cor. 4: 12-13	What can be expected as we follow Jesus?	Persecuted/slandered/ cursed.
Mark 8: 34	What should we do in following Jesus?	Deny yourself.
Mark 8: 35	What will you lose?	Your life.
Mark 8: 36	What should we want to give up/keep?	The whole world / our soul.

FIRST APPLICATION: Having read those passages, most of us would agree we aren't to serve two masters. We agree, but how are we doing. As the retired pastoral adviser for Lutheran Hour Ministries, I had the opportunity to visit with a missionary who told me this story. He was in Africa and working on the conversion of a native there. Patiently, he had explained how Christians reject idols and follow the Savior. No matter what he said, there was resistance from the native. After a lengthy conversation one day, the unconverted man placed a small statue and a silver coin on the table in front of them. Then he took two slips of paper and wrote something on each. Putting one beside the image and

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the other next to the coin, he turned to the Christian worker and said, "Read these." On the note by the idol were written the words, "This is the god of the heathens." The sheet next to the coin bore the inscription, "This is the god of the Christians." From what that native had seen, he had decided that money, not Jesus, was what made Christians function. God forbid that we give that impression. Nevertheless, what other conclusion can be drawn when the Lord's work goes begging year after year. How very different from our use of God's gifts is the example set by Jesus. If anyone thinks this is too strongly said, then here is a question which needs to be answered:

SUPPOSE: Jesus had \$40,000, and

SUPPOSE: Jesus knew about children who were starving and in slavery in the Sudan.

WHAT KIND OF CAR DO YOU SUPPOSE Jesus would buy? _____

We know the answer to that question. While we might hem and haw, coming up with all kinds of excuses why we should keep our money, Jesus would help. Quite possibly that is why Jesus gave us some warnings in Scripture. Look at these

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH - THE WAY OF GOD IS GOOD AND BEST

Mark 10: 23	What does Jesus say is difficult for rich people? Are we rich?	To enter God's kingdom. YES / NO
	What do we have that Caesar Augustus didn't?	TV/Radio/Computer/Car/etc.
Luke 12:15	How should we not measure our lives?	By the abundance of our possessions.
Jer. 9: 23-24	What should NOT be our boast? What should be our boast?	Wisdom, strength or riches. We understand and know the Lord.
Luke 12: 33-34	What are we providing for ourselves? Where does Jesus say our treasure is?	A treasure in heaven. In the same place as our heart.
2 Cor. 9: 6	What lesson do we learn about sowing?	You get back what you give.
9: 7	Where should we decide what to give?	In our hearts.
9: 7	What should not be part of our decision?	Compulsion from others.
9: 7	What does God love?	A cheerful giver.

THOUGHT & ILLUSTRATION: - God loves cheerful givers. Suppose your pastor got up at the beginning of the Annual Voter's meeting, and said: "I have a marvelous announcement to make about our building fund and our congregation's stewardship program for this year: Friends, we have the money!" What would be the reaction of your church to such a pronouncement?

What would be the reaction if the pastor then held up his hands for silence and added, "Yes, we have all the money we need. Now all we have to do is give it!"

Anger Betrayal Bad joke Sick Get another pastor

I don't know a single pastor who would have the courage to do such a thing. Most congregations would think his remarks are in very bad taste. Nevertheless, those remarks are accurate. God gives the resources to accomplish His purposes. Now, He wants to see if people, having knelt at the cross and run to the open tomb, are thankful for what He has done. He wants to find out if they are taking His command to go, teach, preach and baptize seriously. He wants to see if there are any cheerful givers around.

Are you one? YES/NO Is there something you should change? What? _____

THE WAY OF PRAYER – Dear Lord, many people are willing to give You credit, yet few are willing to give You cash. Teach me Your way of giving so that I might share my riches without regret, fear, or second thoughts. In Jesus' Name. Amen.