

WEEK TWO

1) "LEAVING ROOM FOR GOD..." BUT HOW?

On Sunday morning October 22nd, Pastor Mike shared a message that spoke about "*leaving room for God*" to work in all areas of life. Yet, when it comes to generosity, how do you make sense of the gospel's call to extravagant and even sacrificial generosity if you are struggling to make ends meet? What does Jesus' promise of abundant life mean in a world where so many suffer from want, deprivation, and inequality? How can what the Bible (Jesus) teaches about money and giving add up, given what we understand to be the realities of economic life?

This study and the next two, will seek to help us attempt to answer these very personal and important questions for ourselves and move us toward choices and decisions that will help us live in a proper relationship to our resources (time, energy, material/monetary). For individual Christians, the way we use the resources God entrusts to us in a primary way we demonstrate and grow in our faith. (Genesis 2:15, ¹⁵ *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it..."*)

CHALLENGES TO GENEROSITY IN SCRIPTURE

Challenges to living out generosity and "*taking care of*" all that God has blessed us with is nothing new for God's people. Consider these passages as you read them.

- ☐ **Matthew 6:26-34**, ³¹ *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"* ³² *For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*
- ☐ **1 Kings 17:8-16**, ¹² *And she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die."* ¹³ *And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear..."*
- ☐ **Acts 5:1-11**, ³ *Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."*

REFLECTION

- ☐ Which of these statements from Lovett Weem's book seems more true when it relates to the challenges of living a life of generosity? How would you order them?
 - **From Fearfulness to Faith** - *"Our economic system is grounded in a paradigm of fear and risk. We believe it is our responsibility to protect our own interests. We are taught by our culture "to look out for number one." In contrast, the Christian worldview is grounded in the faith that God will care for us and provide for our needs. Faith does not release us from sound financial decisions, we still need to*

attend to our financial matters. But it does release us from anxiety and prevents us from being overly preoccupied with things.

- **From Scarcity to Abundance** – *“One of the underlying assumptions of a capitalist economy is that goods and services are scarce and must be rationed and even hoarded. But faith teaches that our abundant God desires that all God’s people be blessed emotionally, spiritually, and materially. Scarcity says there is never enough. Abundance says God has already given us everything we need. Scarcity says the glass is always half empty. Abundance says our cup overflows and never runs out.”*
- **From Owners to Stewards** – *“One of the bedrock foundations of the American economic system is private ownership. We worked hard for it. We possess and control the things we claim as our own. The attitude is, ‘I bought it. I paid for it. I deserve it. And it is mine to do as I please.’ In contrast, faith see things through the lens of stewardship and servanthood. Everything belongs to God. The biblical narrative repeats over and over, we don’t truly own anything, not even ourselves. We are stewards, caretakers like Adam and Eve, of all that God has entrusted to us.”*
- **From Acquiring to Giving** – *“Our consumer driven economy is organized around the premise that individuals are motivated to acquire more and more things. Our possessions are the ultimate measure of life and success. We are always encouraged to ‘keep up with the Joneses’ and ‘whoever dies with the most toys wins.’ We find in the scriptures that the Christian faith derives its value not from what we gain but what we give away or even sacrifice. In the Christian faith giving is Godly, worshipful, sacred and an expression of our love of God, love of ourselves and love of our neighbor.*

CLOSING THOUGHT

- Praying for our *“Next Faithful Step.”* Those words suggest movement. So does Lovett Weems Reflections imply movement within the Christian life. God’s Holy Spirit is always moving us towards God’s will and purposes. The questions at the start of this lesson (*Leaving Room for God*) are difficult and not easily answered. Fortunately, we are not on our own. Through prayer, reflection, the power of God’s Spirit, and having faith, we can move and take steps towards God’s will for us.