

*Rich Toward God*

**LEADER'S GUIDE**

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## AS WE BEGIN...

**T**he opportunity to partner with you in teaching and leading your congregation to focus on stewardship is a great privilege. Thank you for allowing me to help you guide people to become “rich toward God.” As we also know, the results will bless them and expand the Kingdom, too!

As Christians grow and truly believe that God has the power to meet their needs as they trust Him with their finances, they will explode in their spiritual growth. At the same time, the devil hates anything that leads people to greater trust in God and His promises, so we must stay ready to encourage our listeners. I’ve heard it said that, “Some people can’t give until they grow spiritually and some can’t grow spiritually until they give.” Thankfully, this book and your sermons will help on both sides of the question.

Preaching is great...yet we know that Sunday morning conviction often cools by Monday. This book was designed to compliment and empower your preaching ministry. Put these two teaching opportunities together: a week of reading and praying, followed by your sermons on Sunday and the leading of the Lord. As we’ve seen so many times, this is what will stimulate true and lasting change in behavior in the area of positive stewardship. Putting your sermons and these chapters together is a powerful spiritual and educational strategy!

Follow these three steps as you present this teaching to your church:

- Pray** Eagerly desire to see your listeners embrace the promises of God. There is no hype or pressure in the book or in your sermons. Relying on God’s Spirit to touch minds and hearts releases you from feeling that it’s all up to you. Invest time in prayer before, during, and after the series, and God will reward your efforts.
- Prepare** The key teaching strategy in this series emphasizes the *combination effect* of reading the book chapters and listening to the sermons. Keep encouraging people to read a chapter during the week. This enables each person to focus on specific Bible passages that will connect with others from which you will be preaching. Spend some extra time reading Luke 12, too.
- Present** As you present your messages, stay positive, practical, and personal. Don’t be afraid to preach on how stewardship might be a growth area for you. God will honor the genuineness of your faith and your desire to see your people invest in eternity. The approach will disarm opposition to preaching on giving and open people up to God.

May the Lord use *Rich Toward God*, this leader’s guide, and your leadership to bless and expand His Kingdom. I’m thrilled to have the privilege of working with you to teach God’s promises about giving. You are in for a wonderful adventure!

KREGG R. HOOD, ED.D.

Ozark, MO

## QUICK START: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

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### THE KEYS TO THE PROGRAM

As you review the resources in this leader's guide, please feel free to adapt them to fit your needs, style, and church culture. However, the components that are most critical to the success of the program are:

- **Positive Sermons**—Four positive, motivating, benefits-oriented sermons on giving (especially tithing) build excitement, faith, and hope. Guilt and condemnation do not work.
- **Family Reading**—As families read the book together and discuss it at home, they will be better prepared to hear and receive the promises of God that you will share in your sermons.
- **Church-wide Participation**—Not only will church-wide participation give you better results, it is a unifying experience for your congregation.

The Sunday school class/small group resources have been provided for churches who wish to reinforce the *Rich Toward God* principles in Sunday school classes or small groups. Some churches choose to use these settings, rather than the pulpit, as the primary teaching platform. While both are effective, the greater success has come when the pulpit is the primary teaching emphasis and the class or small group settings served as reinforcement.

### ACTION CHECKLIST

Each item following has been carefully and thoroughly field-tested to help you receive the maximum teaching effect through: (a) Example, (b) Instruction, and (c) Application. Utilizing these tools together will have a profound impact on the spiritual growth, unity, and giving level of your congregation.

#### \_\_\_\_\_ One or Two Month(s) before Sermon 1

- Enlist leadership support by giving them an advance copy of *Rich Toward God* and telling them that you are planning a series of lessons on giving. (Give them the dates.)
- Ask leadership to pray for you each week as you prepare and present the sermon series, as well as for your teachers/group leaders as they prepare their lessons (if you decide to use those resources).
- Ask someone to serve as series coordinator and help you implement the logistical details of the series. This person can make sure that the books are distributed on time and that each step in this guide is followed.

- If using the Sunday school/small group lessons, mail the introductory letter to your teachers/group leaders (see page 27). It is crucial that they hold the same commitment to practice the stewardship principles of trust, tithing, and generosity, or “mixed messages” will be sent to the congregation that could impair the effectiveness of the entire experience. Study Numbers 13 and 14 for a convicting story on the importance of unity in following the heart of God.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **The Week before Sermon 1**

(Date Scheduled)

- Print Bulletin Ad 1 to promote the upcoming series (see page 7).
- Minister makes Pulpit Announcement 1 in the Sunday AM service (see page 8).
- A “key leader” follows immediately with Pulpit Announcement 2 (see page 8).
- Distribute one copy of ***Rich Toward God*** to every family.
- Encourage every family to read Luke 12:13-34, the introduction, and the first chapter and work through the questions at the end of the chapter before the following Sunday.
- You may choose to mail a book and insert to your absent members so they have an opportunity to read Chapter 1 during the week.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Week 1 of Series**

(Date Scheduled)

- Print Bulletin Ad 2 (see page 7).
- Mail Introductory Letter to Church (see page 6) the Monday following book distribution.
- Ask someone in your congregation to prepare a two- or three-minute offering meditation to share with the church (see page 10.) This should be presented before the offering is taken in the Sunday morning worship service.
- Pray, prepare, and present Sermon 1: “Rich Toward God” (or another encouraging message of your choice on giving). (Sermon resources begin on page 11).
- Remind everyone to read Chapter 2 during the following week.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Week 2 of Series**

(Date Scheduled)

- Print Bulletin Ad 3 (see page 7).
- Select someone to prepare and present an offering meditation (see page 10).

- Pray, prepare, and present Sermon 2. The suggested message in this series is “Enter the Power Zone” or, if you prefer, “Opening the Windows of Heaven.”
- Remind everyone to read Chapter 3 in the following week.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Week 3 of Series**

(Date Scheduled)

- Print Bulletin Ad 4 (see page 7).
- Select someone to prepare and present an offering meditation (see page 10).
- Pray, prepare, and present Sermon 3. I suggest “When Heaven Takes Notice” because it will help those who are irregular in their giving.
- Remind everyone to read Chapter 4 the following week.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Week 4 of Series**

(Date Scheduled)

- Print Bulletin Ad 5 (see page 7).
- Select someone to prepare and present an offering meditation (see page 10).
- On Monday or Tuesday, plan a special time of prayer with your church leaders and ask for God’s help as you approach the concluding message.
- Pray, prepare, and present Sermon 4, “Kingdom Living and the 100 Times Harvest” (or one like it).

### \_\_\_\_\_ **The Week after the Series Concludes**

(Date Scheduled)

- Print Bulletin Ad 6 (see page 7).

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Ongoing Follow-Up**

- Give each member a copy of the Prayer Guidelines (see page 30).
- Give each new member a copy of the book *Rich Toward God* and the New Member Letter (see page 31) as they place membership.
- Offering meditations should be continued throughout the year, either by members sharing times when God blessed them or a sermon illustration as found in this leader’s guide.

## INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO CHURCH

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- **Preparation**—Prepare this letter a few days before handing out the books. If desired, modify it to be a letter from the elders, deacons, finance committee, or some other leadership group in the church.

[Date]

Dear [Name of Congregation] Family:

If you've ever felt frustrated or even aggravated by the topic of giving, you will be surprised by what you'll read in God's Word about it. Just yesterday, we began an adventure in faith with the Lord as we distributed a book entitled *Rich Toward God* by Dr. Gregg Hood.

The biblical study and practical insights in this book have convicted me in a very positive way. I believe that these exciting truths will encourage genuine generosity here at [name of church].

Perhaps we have too often underestimated God's plan for us. After all, God promises to take care of our financial needs when we trust Him with our giving. So our leaders have decided to step out in faith by trusting the Lord with every financial need and decision.

Please join us as we learn, grow, and receive God's rewards together. If you didn't receive your copy of *Rich Toward God* Sunday, please come by the building during office hours or pick one up Wednesday evening. Read the introduction and Chapter 1 at home this week. We'll read a new chapter each week as we pray for God's guidance and study this spiritual act of worship together.

In Christian love,

Minister

## **BULLETIN ADS**

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Encourage weekly participation by using the bulletin ads, such as the following examples.

### **BULLETIN Ad 1**

On Sunday, [insert date of the Sunday prior to preaching Sermon 1], we will distribute an exciting new book, *Rich Toward God*. Each family will receive one copy to share at home. We will explore God's Word in a sermon series based on this book the following week. Be sure to get your book this Sunday!

### **BULLETIN Ad 2**

Sunday, [date], kicks off an exciting new series on the power of giving. Pick up your book, *Rich Toward God*, in the church office if your family didn't receive a copy last Sunday. Before Sunday, read Luke 12:13-34, the introduction of *Rich Toward God*, and Chapter 1 to discover the importance of developing a "heavenly investment portfolio."

### **BULLETIN Ad 3**

Explore God's Word and see how tithing is still a way to "put the Lord to the test." Sound intriguing? Read Chapter 2 from *Rich Toward God* to start your discovery process before Sunday.

### **BULLETIN Ad 4**

Come Sunday to learn something remarkable about God's loving provision. Before Sunday, read Chapter 3 from *Rich Toward God* to see how to advance the Kingdom every day.

### **BULLETIN Ad 5**

Continue to grow your *Rich Toward God* investment portfolio as we conclude the series. As you read the last chapter during the week, focus on the joy of learning contentment and trust that God will open everyone up to this secret.

### **BULLETIN Ad 6**

We praise God for the benefits we've seen during our *Rich Toward God* series. Several members have already begun sharing their stories of faith and God's work in their lives. As you experience God's faithful provision, please share these stories with us in the church office.

## PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

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### **ANNOUNCEMENT 1—BY MINISTER ON SUNDAY OF BOOK DISTRIBUTION**

I have discovered a book that takes a positive, fresh look at what it means to see giving as an investment in the things of God. I liked it so much that I immediately shared it with our leaders here at [name of congregation]. After praying together about the best way to use this book, we were all excited about the decision to use it here starting [give date]. It's called *Rich Toward God* by Dr. Kregg Hood, and it will help us all better understand what Scripture has to say about how we can use the money God has entrusted to us to make a difference for His Kingdom but also how He will bless us as we trust Him.

After we felt convicted to begin this four-week series here, I asked [name] to share his impressions of *Rich Toward God*. [First name], tell us what the Lord has put on your heart as one of our leaders.

### **ANNOUNCEMENT 2—BY KEY LEADER AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT 1**

[Name of minister] brought this book to our attention, and we read it with surprise and enjoyment. Even though I feel I've learned a lot about giving over the years, this little book took my thinking in new directions. For example, [share an insight or testimony that fits with *Rich Toward God*].

We gave this book a lot of thought and prayer and felt that this is truth that is needed in all of our lives. So, we've purchased a copy of this book for each family. We want you to take a copy today (at no cost to you) and read Luke 12:13-34, the introduction, and Chapter 1 at home this week. The book has only four short chapters and is easy to read. We encourage you to read a chapter each week.

[Name of minister] will begin his sermon series on this teaching next Sunday. No matter what you think about the topic of giving, I believe you're going to enjoy this series.

Let's pray together and ask God for His blessing on this study.



## BOOK INSERT (OPTIONAL)

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- **Purpose**— You might want to use this book insert to help give families suggestions for daily involvement during this special “stewardship month.” The inserts provide an important reminder and a valuable guide for families as they read and discuss the chapter and the suggested discussion questions at the end of each chapter.
- **Preparation**— Insert one insert into each book before distribution. Use a different color of paper to make the inserts stand out. You might also want to customize the wording or add your church graphics. If you print two copies of the insert on each page and cut the pages in half, each insert will fit nicely in a book.
- **Challenge**—When families are handed their books, ask a leader to challenge them to dedicate the next thirty days to keeping God, money, and stewardship as their topic for personal study, prayer, and family discussions.

### **How to Get the Most from *Rich Toward God***

1. Encourage your family to read a chapter together each week (they're short); pick Monday or Tuesday, if possible.
2. Discuss the principles with a close friend or family member (kids, too). It's especially valuable to do this “around the kitchen table” at least one evening each week. The questions at the end of each chapter are designed to help you see and experience the wonderful blessings that come from God as we put His Kingdom first.
3. If you're married:
  - Pray together daily with your spouse about your own family's finances, needs, attitudes, etc.
  - Talk about your family's attitudes and habits about money, giving, etc.
  - Explore your various background experiences with money and giving. Include your parents' perspectives, too. In what areas do you and your mate see things the same way? How are your perspectives different? Why?
4. If you are single, find a friend and work through the same issues that are mentioned in item 3.
5. As you work through the chapter and the questions, remember that this book is not just about giving. More than anything, it's about taking a fresh, new step of faith.

## OFFERING MEDITATIONS

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- **Importance**— During the series, set aside an extra two or three minutes before the offering for someone to talk briefly about the importance of the offering. The offering is often hurried through as if a necessary chore, rather than a worship opportunity to celebrate God's provision and deepen our trust in Him as a God who keeps His promises.
- **Testimony**— Ask a respected member of the congregation to give a two-minute message of encouragement or a testimony of how God has blessed his giving.
- **What to Share**— The comments should be short, encouraging, and personal. The person might share how giving to God has blessed his family. He might even give a practical suggestion from his life about trusting God. It's especially helpful if the person refers to a comment from *Rich Toward God* and how the series is helping him learn to "invest in eternity."
- **Prayer of Thanksgiving**— Following this brief comment, the person should lead a prayer of thanksgiving.
- **Ongoing Testimonies and Stories**— Once the series is completed, this practice should be continued from time to time. At least once a month, reserve two or three minutes before the offering for someone to give a word of encouragement about the blessing of giving. The comments should not be limited to personal stories. Several of the sermon illustrations in this guide may also be used in this meditation time.

## SERMON PRINCIPLES

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- **Positive Tone**— The sermons are essential to the success of the program. A positive message that communicates how the listeners benefit is more motivating and has a more lasting impact than a negative one.
- **The Topic of Tithing**— Sermon 2 should focus on tithing, but works best when you make it a personal testimony about your own positive, personal experiences with tithing (this disarms critics and cynics).
- **God-Directed**— After studying and praying over each sermon outline, determine what you think God wants you to present to your listeners.
- **Personalization & Illustration**— Adjust the wording to fit your personal communication style and add sermon illustrations. Use personal stories from your congregation or ministry experiences whenever possible. Illustrations on giving are included for your use as needed.
- **Length**— Each lesson takes about thirty minutes to preach. Your time could vary due to a variety of factors, such as your speaking rate, the amount of material you use from each outline, new material you develop, etc.

## SERMON OUTLINE 1: "RICH TOWARD GOD"

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The suggested introductory sermon begins with Luke 12:13-32 and a look at the Parable of the Rich Fool. While the man in Luke 12 came to a poor ending, none of us need to. As you preach each message...

- **Warn, but keep a positive tone**— Preach Sermon 1 with a sense that no one should get caught in the trap that turned the rich man into the rich fool.
- **Share Your Struggles and Your Victories**— Your personal experience with giving is powerful and real. People will follow you as they sense that you are on their side.
- **Be Motivational**— Have your sermon aim to help the congregation *want* to take a step up in their giving and decide to become "rich toward God."
- **Call people to make the following four decisions:**
  - I. Put Your Greed on Notice: "Greed, you are not in control."
    - A. Greed is a huge problem today.
      1. Check out the most recent stats for debt.
      2. The well known phrase is still valid: "We spend money we don't have on things we don't need to impress people we don't even like."
      3. Illustration: As of 1987 there are now more shopping malls than high schools in the USA.
    - B. Greed's definition, in the New Testament is "an insatiable desire for more."
      1. Greed is actually a false god (Col. 3:5).
      2. It has nothing to do with the amount of money that one has but has everything to do with the attitude in the heart.
    - C. Greed tries to trap us, as it did with the rich man, through the following:
      1. Competition and comparison (v. 13).
        - a) These men were brothers. What a shame!
        - b) We need to be happy with what we have instead of always wanting more.
        - c) Illustration: An annual survey has asked Americans if they were "very happy" and the high point was in 1957.
        - d) Quote from NY psychologist, Paul Wechtel (see page 22)
      2. Selfishness
        - a) Notice the rich man's use of "I", "me", and "my" words.
      3. Worry and fear

- a) Greed makes you feel like you don't have enough.
  - b) Jesus will address this later in the passage.
- D. Only one way to beat greed - believe that God owns it all and He and only He is in control (1 Chron. 29:14).

II. Do Your Giving While You're Living, So You're Knowing Where It's Going.

- A. (v. 20) We are all stewards - the question is what kind of a steward are we? Good one or not so good.
- B. One day, every single one of us will give everything we have away.
  - 1. Are you getting ready?
  - 2. Are you having fun with your giving right now?
- C. Giving is wonderful! Here are the ways to give:
  - 1. Tithing - tithing will never hurt you (Prov. 11:24).
  - 2. Special offerings - "over and above the tithe".
    - a) Quote from E.M. Clark, a 96 year-old preacher and author on stewardship and one of my heroes said, "Whenever you find good soil, it is to your advantage to plant seed in it." (Amen!)
  - 3. Legacy offerings - giving "appreciated assets" (stock, bonds, land, etc.)
    - a) He did his giving while he was living so was knowing where it was going.

III. Always Thank God for Something Every Day (v. 22-30).

- A. We are the Father's children and He cares for us very much!
- B. We need a "Reality Check"
  - 1. Think about the rich man...he was rich, right?
  - 2. If so, did he ever ride in a car, shop at a grocery store, talk on the phone, flip on a light switch, sleep on an inner spring mattress, experience air conditioning, drink a bottle of water, take a hot shower, etc.
  - 3. If he was rich and he never did any of those things, what am I?
- C. Illustration: Show picture of 1994 Pulitzer Prize photo taken by Kevin Carter.
- D. Clearly, we have much to be thankful for.

IV. Make God and His Kingdom Your Top Priority (31-32).

- A. The Father is also "pleased" to give us His Kingdom.
- B. He wants to partner with us and have us partner with Him.
- C. Illustration: Supporting a mission trip - "And He is always in a good mood."

## SERMON OUTLINE 2: "ENTER THE POWER ZONE"

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This message, from Malachi 3:9-12, Prov. 3:9-10, Luke 6:38, and 2 Cor. 9:6-8, is very positive and personal. Be very autobiographical. It shows everyone how to see tithing as a way to receive more of God's power. This is not a "name it and claim it" sermon but is, in fact, a legitimate biblical lesson that should help to drive fear from the hearts and minds of your listeners. For Sermon 2, I strongly recommend and remind you to:

- **Empathize with your listeners**— Share why you choose to tithe, even when it has been a challenge. Make sure people see that you are still a learner, too, and that it never stops being both a step of faith and a way to experience more of the Lord's power and faithfulness.
- **Emphasize Benefits**— Emphasize the benefits of tithing (not the consequences of not tithing).
- **Receive Blessing**— Share that you want to tithe so you don't miss out on a blessing and your church doesn't miss out on God's plan for it.

### I. Introduction- What I'm learning about tithing...

- A. I don't tithe because I "have to" but because I "want to."
- B. Tithing brings us into a "power zone."
- C. When it comes to giving, think about these three key passages:
  1. The amount: a tenth (Mal. 3:10)
  2. The timing: first (Prov. 3:9-10)
  3. The results: generous sowing = generous reaping = having all you need (2 Cor. 6-8)
- D. There are four ways that tithing empowers us:

### II. Tithing expresses my loyalty and commitment to God (Mal. 3:10).

- A. The tenth symbolizes the total - God owns it all.
- B. Tithing leads me to prioritize my relationship with God.
- C. Add an illustration of the way people have been able to give and have also overcome materialism.

### III. Tithing lets me experience greater financial protection and blessing.

- A. Tithing is a way to "reverse the curse" (Mal. 3:9-12).
  1. All the Israelites had to do to be blessed was to start back and tithe.
  2. God didn't require them to "pay back" their "back tithes"; He just wanted them to start back to doing what was right and He let them

know that they would be blessed.

- B. The promise of Mal. 3 was never rescinded (see Luke 6:38 and 2 Cor. 9:6-8).
  - 1. Compare the promises about tithing to the promise about the Rainbow.
  - 2. We believe God will keep the promise to never again destroy the earth by water, even though this promise is never repeated in the New Testament; why is tithing any different?
- C. I want to be blessed - how about you?
- D. Add an illustration of giving.

IV. Tithing exposes the doubt, fear, and greed that tempt my heart.

- A. The devil never gives up trying to trick, scare, or seduce us to lower our commitment to the Lord.
- B. Tithing is actually a form of spiritual warfare!

V. Tithing explodes ministry impact!

- A. In recent years, the average per capita giving in churches in the USA has dropped from 2.5% to less than 2%.
- B. Imagine what would happen if we all gave at least 10%, (ministries started, projects funded, buildings paid for with cash, etc.)
- C. Describe several new ministries or projects that need to be accomplished for God. Cast vision for what could happen and the lives that could be changed. Add an illustration from your ministry that reflects this level of commitment and the way God is already working.
- D. Even more than that, imagine what God might do...
- E. Cast vision for what still needs to be done and how it would be fantastic to be a part of that growth and blessing.

## **SERMON OUTLINE 2 (ALTERNATE SUGGESTION): "OPENING THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN"**

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This message, based on an expository approach from Malachi 3:6-18, is very positive and personal. It also emphasizes trusting in God's plan for giving and encourages listeners to grow beyond seeing tithing as a legalistic demand. Instead, it draws people to give out of love and worship, believing that God will empower them to give and to receive.

### I. Introduction-What's Tithing About?

- A. Tithing refers to the practice of giving at least 10 percent of one's income back to God to be used in ministry. (Another way of saying this is, tithing is "tenthing.")
- B. Tithing opens up windows for God to bless us - the word in Hebrew is translated "window," "floodgate," and "chimney." It refers to "openings" created between God and us.
- C. There are four "windows" or "openings" that tithing allows us to experience.

### II. The Window of Loyalty (Mal. 3:10).

- A. God says, "Test me in this." It's the only time we're told we can test God.
- B. Tithing is one of the ways God creates a bond of loyalty between Him and us.
  - 1. Why tithing is important.
  - 2. Frequency (more than 50 references in Scripture).
  - 3. Symbolism - God owns everything.
  - 4. God's heart.
    - a) God's unchanging nature (3:6).
    - b) Old Testament examples (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6).
    - c) The "higher standard" of the New Testament.
    - d) Tithing is consistent with New Testament principles of giving a great model of generosity.
- C. Tithing says, "I'm loyal to God and He's loyal to me. I can trust Him to take care of me."

### III. The Window of Personal Provision.

- A. The question is not, do I have to tithe? The question is, do I want to be blessed (2 Cor. 9:6-8)?
- B. The provision will be more than you can handle (Mal. 3:10).
  - 1. It may even be enormous!



2. It will also be appropriate for you and your situation (1 Tim. 6:9).
  3. It will cause appreciation.
- C. Notice - the "floodgate" (window) may be either open (Mal. 3:10-12) or closed (see Hag. 1:7-11).
- D. I want to be blessed - how about you?

#### IV. The Window of Financial Order.

- A. I don't want to be selfish ("rob God").
- B. Tithing will . . .
1. Put discipline into my spending.
  2. Help me create a "God-based" budget.
  3. Prepare me for "true riches"
- C. Tithing is only a starting point!

#### V. The Window of Spiritual Identity (Mal. 3:17-18).

- A. Tithing is only one part of what it means to be the "people of God."
- B. God promises that we are His "treasured possession" - this is a Messianic passage so we can know it points to our day, as well.
- C. God is seeking people who. . .
1. Have His heart.
  2. Can be trusted with His work.
  3. Want to be like Jesus (Luke 16:11; 1 Tim. 6:6-8).

## **SERMON OUTLINE 3: "WHEN HEAVEN TAKES NOTICE"**

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Introduction - Paul's letter to the church in Philippi shares several wonderful insights about what happens in heaven when we financially support the work of the Kingdom. As you read Paul's writing, you can almost see the angels watching, taking notice of what is going on here on earth. We can only imagine their joy as they see us partner with the Lord through giving.

- I. Heaven Takes Notice as Part of God's "To Do" List Is Accomplished (Phil. 4:15-16).
  - A. The Christians at Philippi sent Paul "aid" - a clear reference to money.
    1. Paul's task? To preach and teach the Gospel- their gifts supported that great work.
    2. Question: Would you have supported Paul? Of course we would - after all he is the apostle Paul!
      - a) Yet, if you would be willing to support Paul, you should also be willing to also support any ministry that has the same purposes, because it is doing God's work.
      - b) In our minds it may matter "who does what," but not in God's mind. Anyone who does the work of God is just as legitimate a recipient of funds as Paul. Why? Because God has work to do and He wants us to all be involved.
  - B. Every time you give, it leads to some aspect of the Lord's work being accomplished. And, since God keeps up with everything that's done in His name, it's as if He has a "to do" list that gets checked off every time some piece of His ministry is accomplished.
  - C. Remember, money has to be given before it can do any good.
- II. Heaven Takes Notice as the Lord Updates Our Individual "Heavenly IRA's" (4:17).
  - A. Paul says these gifts were "credited" to their account.
  - B. No one can give for you - just as no one can be saved for you, pray instead of you, serve instead of you, or love God instead of you.
  - C. God tracks your love and all your efforts for Him - this includes financial gifts (Matt. 6:4, 20).
  - D. God never makes a mistake in His accounting, either!
- III. Heaven Takes Notice as God Is Pleased with Our Giving (4:18).
  - A. The third thing that is happening in heaven when we give is that God likes what we're doing.
  - B. Their gifts to support Paul and his ministry of preaching and teaching the Gospel were. . .

1. A fragrant offering (pleasant).
2. An acceptable sacrifice (versus simply giving out of their surplus).
3. Pleasing to God.

C. Your gifts do the same thing.

#### IV. Heaven Takes Notice as God Extends His Personal Care to Us (4:19).

A. Paul says God will meet ALL your needs.

1. The verse does not say "some of your needs" or "most of your needs" or "only your spiritual needs." ALL means every need.
2. He does this "according to His riches" - His provision is "in keeping with" what God owns.
3. What does God own?
  - a) Some examples include things like "the cattle on a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).
  - b) His eternal wisdom (Col. 2:3; James 1:5).
  - c) His power to do what is not possible in our human capabilities (Rom. 8:8).

B. His care and provision for us is not "out of" but "according to" - that means it never runs out!

C. Most of all, these riches are "in Christ" - that means giving is not just about money, it's about believing. So, above all else, make the decision to trust and follow Jesus with all your heart.

## SERMON OUTLINE 4: “KINGDOM LIVING AND THE 100 TIMES HARVEST”

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One of the most well-known parables is the Parable of the Soils (Matthew 13:3-23). You can teach a creative message from this passage that encourages members to give more generously than ever before.

- **Connect a Familiar Passage to Giving**— Note that this is a well known passage and reflects foundational truth about living in the Kingdom of God - yet few, if any, have ever heard it applied to giving.
- **Be Motivational**— Continue to be highly motivational and use uplifting stories and an encouraging tone. Keep out guilt trips and keep up the positive spirit!
- **Communicate Faith**— Build everyone’s confidence for the link between sowing (obeying God) and reaping (results from God). Help your listeners believe that God controls the nature and extent of the harvest.

### I. Understand With Your Heart (v. 19).

- A. This parable is, first and foremost, about how we receive spiritual truth.
  1. Note that we understand with our hearts, not just our heads.
  2. Key Insight: *The way you hear determines how you will respond and the way you respond determines how much you will reap in any area of Kingdom living that you are learning about.*
  3. Since the parable applies to Kingdom living in general, it will also include the topic of giving.
- B. The four soils are pictures of four ways our hearts respond to God’s truth.
  1. It is a mistake to interpret the four soils as simply four types of people - it’s much more complex.
  2. The four types of soils represent four types of “heart responses”:
    - a. The Path = a hard hart (resisting God’s truth)
    - b. Stony Soil = a superficial heart (shallow commitment)
    - c. Thorny Soil = a divided heart (compromising or fearful)
    - d. Good Soil = a receptive heart (willing and eager)
  3. See why it’s not enough to simply understand truth mentally?
- C. I Want to have a willing heart, don’t you? (Add illustration - willing obedience)

### II. Receive the Teaching with Joy (v. 20).

- A. Attitude is important in everything! (Add illustration - positive attitude)
- B. The #1 attitude to have is that God is a good God!
  1. The proof of this fact is all over the Bible. Look at these examples:
    - a) God is rich in provision (Prov. 3:9-10)
    - b) God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4)
    - c) God is rich in wisdom (James 3:17)
  2. We can receive teaching from God about giving with joy because the

Lord is the one who brings the results

C. We can anticipate God doing great things. (Add illustration - God's provision)

### III. Persevere Through the Tough Times (v. 21).

- A. Get ready - challenges will come. Obeying God does not mean we won't face temptations or troubles.
- B. The passage says that (1) troubles and (2) persecution will come "because of the Word (the teaching).
  - 1. This tells us that the Devil is real.
  - 2. But, don't ever forget that God is with us and He is all-powerful.
  - 3. Add an illustration of God's protection.
- C. We want to stay true to our commitment because, if we don't, this passage says that it's actually a form of "falling away."
  - 1. Is this saying that we can lose our salvation if we don't give? Hardly - that would violate other clear passages about God's grace.
  - 2. But it does mean we will fall back and "stumble" in our trust in God and our application of divine truth.
  - 3. Add an illustration of perseverance, especially in giving.

### IV. Maintain God's Perspective on Money (v. 22).

- A. Always watch out for man's view of money - it is full of problems because man tends to be choked by:
  - 1. "Worries of this life" - finances, paying bills, "the future", etc.
  - 2. "Deceitfulness of wealth" - the world's economic system is very dangerous because of greed, uncertainty, and materialism
  - 3. Add stats or an illustration from current economic situations, perseverance, especially in giving.
  - 4. There are actually only four things you can do with money: make it, give it, save it, or spend it - and the Bible has a lot to say about each one, either specifically or in principle.
- B. If you don't resist these issues with worldly wealth, two things will happen:
  - 1. You'll be choked spiritually.
  - 2. You'll miss out on God's harvest for you.
  - 3. Add an illustration on following God in giving or finances.

### V. Prepare for a Great Crop! (v. 23)

- A. This is supernatural! God brings 30, 60, and even 100 times the investment.
  - 1. In human strength we are thrilled when an investment produces 1, 2, or 3 times what was invested.
  - 2. Illustration from marketing: 30, 60, 100 times what was sown = 3,000%, 6,000%, and 10,000% return on investment.
- B. Note the phrase, "what was sown" - the crop is based on the seed.
- C. Hear, understand, obey - you will see good things happen because this is God's Word. (Add another illustration of how following God brings blessing)

## SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

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An annual survey has asked Americans if they were “very happy” and the high point was in 1957. In referring to this survey, NY psychologist, Paul Wechtel said, “People’s entire orientation as to how they’re doing is based on comparison. That’s why, as a society grows, people don’t feel any better because they’re in the same relative position (as everyone else) ...there’s a sense of being on an endless treadmill and never getting to be where you thought you were going to be.”

- Paul Wechtel

- ❖ -

Legacy giving - A man came up to me after a sermon and said that he gave a large gift of stock to the church once and felt really good about being able to help in a church building project. A year later, he was curious about how much the stock would have been worth if he had kept it. He checked and found that in only a year, the stock had lost 92% of its value! He told me that God had given he and his wife that stock “for such a time as this” and that if he had tried to hang on to it he wouldn’t have had very much.

- Dr. Kregg Hood

- ❖ -

Show a picture of the 1994 Pulitzer Prize photo, taken by Kevin Carter and tell the story of the vulture stalking the orphan child in the Sudan. Clearly, we have much to be thankful for.

- Dr. Kregg Hood

- ❖ -

My wife and I had an opportunity to help support one of our young friends on a recent mission trip to Ecuador. His report letter after the trip was three pages long, single spaced, and told of many wonderful ways that the Lord blessed the combined efforts of the team. He closed his letter with this encouragement - “...these are only two of the many, many amazing stories that I can tell from this trip. For the sake of the letter, I will bring it to a close but I want to leave you with this one thought: God is good. He is always good. And he is always in a good mood.”

- Dr. Kregg Hood

- ❖ -

I still have so much to learn from this lesson which began over twenty years ago when I was doing mission work in South Korea. I vividly remember one day watching a barefooted farmer working in a rice paddy. He was ankle deep in the water walking behind an ox. For a few moments my heart was filled with pity for the hard working farmer. I recall asking, "God, why did you allow me to be born in America where I haven't had to work like this man?" I experienced a profound sense of gratitude for the easier life I've had. But I also noticed another unique insight. The man in the field didn't seem the least bit unhappy. He was doing his job-this is all he knew. From his point of view, life may have been tough but not at all unbearable. He was simply living his life. I found myself combining appreciation for my life with respect for him. Neither of us was better than the other person because of what we did to earn a living. We were just different. It was, and is, up to each of us to learn contentment. Later during my time in Korea I also learned to appreciate and greatly enjoy simple things such as taking a hot shower, eating a meal in a restaurant, driving my own car, and other luxuries that most Americans take for granted.

-Dr. Kregg Hood

- ❖ -

There were two men shipwrecked on an island. The minute they stepped foot on the island one of them started screaming and yelling, "We're going to die! There is no food! No water! We're going to die!"

The second man was propped up against a palm tree, acting so calmly it drove the first man crazy. "Don't you understand?! We're going to die!!" The second man replied, "You don't understand. I make a hundred thousand a week." The first man looked at him quite dumbfounded and asked, "What difference does that make?! We're on an island with no food or water! We're going to DIE!"

The second man answered, "You just don't get it. I make a hundred thousand dollars a week and I tithe 10 percent on that hundred thousand a week to the church. My preacher will find me!"

-Dr. Kregg Hood

- ❖ -

It was a beautiful day for sightseeing around downtown Portland. We were a bunch of counselors on our day off away from the campers, just out for some fun. The weather was perfect for a picnic, so when lunch time came, we set our sights on a small park in town. Since we all had different cravings, we decided to split up, get what each of us wanted, and meet back on the grass in a few minutes.

When my friend Robby headed for a hot dog stand, I decided to keep her company. We watched the vendor put together the perfect hot dog, just the way Robby wanted it. But when she took out her money to pay him, the man surprised us.

"It looks a little on the cool side," he said, "So never mind paying me. This will be my freebie of the day."

We said our thanks, joined our friends in the park, and dug into our food. But as we talked and ate, I was distracted by a man sitting alone nearby, looking at us. I could tell that he hadn't showered for days. Another homeless person, I thought, like all the others you see in cities. I didn't pay much more attention than that.

We finished eating and decided to head off for more sightseeing. But when Robby and I went to the garbage can to throw away my lunch bag, I heard a strong voice ask, "There isn't any food in the bag, is there?"

It was the man who had been watching us. I didn't know what to say, "No, I ate it already."

"Oh," was his only answer, with no shame in his voice at all. He was obviously hungry, couldn't bear to see anything thrown away, and was used to asking this question.

I felt bad for the man, but I didn't know what I could do. That's when Robby said, "I'll be right back. Please wait for me for a minute," and ran off. I watched curiously as she went across to the hot dog stand. Then I realized what she was doing. She bought a hot dog, crossed back to the trash can, and gave the hungry man the food.

When she came back to us, Robby said simply, "I was just passing on the kindness that someone gave to me."

That day I learned how generosity can go farther than the person you give to. By giving, you teach others how to give also.

-Andrea Hensley, *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*  
(Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1997).

- ❖ -

Anne Keegan's article "Blue: Christmas" was a collection of Christmas stories told by Chicago police officers. One was the story of George White. George lived in a rented room at the YMCA. He had one set of clothes, shoes wrapped with rubber bands to keep the soles from flopping, and a threadbare, black overcoat. He spent his mornings napping in an old metal chair in the back of the 18th District office.

Two officers, Kitowski and Mitch, took an interest in the old man, occasionally slipping him a few bucks. They found out that Billy the Greek over at the G & W Grill gave him a hot breakfast every morning, no charge.

The two policemen and their families decided to have George as their guest for Christmas dinner. They gave him presents, which he unwrapped carefully.

As they drove him back to the Y, George asked, "Are these presents really mine to keep?" They assured him they were. "Then we must stop at the G & W Grill before I go home," he said. With that, George began rewrapping his presents.

-Anne Keegan, "Blue Christmas," *Leadership Journal*.



- ❖ -

**Object Lesson-** Drop ten pennies into an empty jar, counting out one penny at a time. Hold the last one up and say, "This penny is the Lord's."

"If you make three thousand dollars a month, then your tithe is three hundred a month. Wow, that seems like a lot. But you know what? It is still only one penny of every dime."

-Dan Huckins

- ❖ -

While I was preaching one Sunday, an elderly woman, Mary, fainted and struck her head on the end of the pew. Immediately, an EMT in the congregation called an ambulance.

As they strapped her to a stretcher and got ready to head out the door, Mary regained consciousness. She motioned for her daughter to come near. Everyone thought she was summoning her strength to convey what could be her final words. The daughter leaned over until her ear was at her mother's mouth. "My offering is in my purse," she whispered.

-Eric Hulstrand, Binford, North Dakota

- ❖ -

According to one Gallup poll commissioned by the Independent Sector, a coalition of 800 nonprofit groups, Americans give. In fact, 73 percent of us give something to somebody. But the average person donates only \$880 per year.

- ❖ -

"The parable of the talents is a real, live parable today. I don't feel that I own anything—my talents or the financial resources I have. I really just hold them in trust, and they're in trust to be used and multiplied. Giving is a process of investing and reinvesting."

—C. William Pollard, chairman, ServiceMaster, which includes Merry Maids, Terminix, TruGreen ChemLawn, and American Home Shield.

- ❖ -

Dear Lord, I have been rereading the record of the rich young ruler and his obviously wrong choice. But it has set me thinking.

No matter how much wealth he had, he could not—  
ride in a car,  
have any surgery,  
turn on a light,  
buy penicillin,  
hear a pipe organ,  
watch TV,  
wash dishes in running water,  
type a letter,  
mow a lawn,  
fly in an airplane,  
sleep on an innerspring mattress,  
or talk on the phone.  
If he was rich, then what am I?

—As seen in *Leadership, Fall 1983. Used by permission.*



**Monte Cox, “A Special Teapot”**— The special contributions are the ones that are the most meaningful, and, I believe, the most like those in the early church. When there is a special need, the money is raised specifically to meet that need. Two Kenyan churches, Flax and Kaptagat, combined forces last year to raise bus fare for the men of the two groups who were going to a major preachers’ meeting. On that Sunday, the Christian carpenter brought a stool he’d made, auctioned it to the Christians, and put the highest bidder’s money in the collection plate. A woman brought a chicken, which was similarly sold. When all was collected, the church had \$50, which was enough to bus 8 men to the preachers’ meeting. Imagine a church of 40 giving more than double the average monthly salary of one member for one contribution.

There is a special teapot on the mantle of the fireplace in our living room. It was a gift from the Christians with whom I worked in Kaptagat from ’82 to ’84. On the day of my last regular visit, they threw me a party, and as part of the festivities, they brought gifts. There were the usual ones—the stool, the chicken, two eggs. But, realizing that these gifts were small by Western standards, they pooled their money and bought me this teapot. Not the \$2 kind like they use, but the \$6 kind, used mainly for decoration. I, who make 60 times more money than any one of them, was the recipient, and they were the givers. If you’re thinking that it must have been a touching and humbling experience for us, you’re right.

—As seen in *the Kenya Report. Used by permission.*

## **LETTER TO SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS/SMALL GROUP LEADERS**

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[Date]

Dear Teacher(s)/Small Group Leader(s):

We have designated the first four Sundays in [month] to be a special time of coordinated Bible study and sermons. Our study will apply insights generated by our reading of Dr. Kregg Hood in his book, *Rich Toward God*.

You have an important role in reinforcing the principles we are learning together. You will be providing a valuable forum for helping families to work through their preconceived ideas about stewardship, overcome unbiblical perspectives, and apply these biblical principles in their everyday lives.

Classes should have some class discussion. Discussion is critical to the success of this series. Each member is being encouraged to read one chapter each week. Teachers should remind their students to “do their homework.” By having discussion, your class will be more inclined to read the text beforehand.

I want to thank you in advance for your commitment to practice these principles and promises in God’s Word. As I was reading Numbers 13 and 14, I was reminded of the importance that we as leadership be unified in following the heart of God.

Thank you so much for teaching and for sharing your God-given talents. You are so important to our church family.

Be God Directed!

Minister/Leader

## TEACHER/SMALL GROUP LEADER HOW TO'S

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1. **Summarize Material for Instruction**— Each week, the leader should present a brief summary (approximately 5-7 minutes) of *Rich Toward God* (Chapter 1 in week 1, etc.) and allow enough time for class discussion.
2. **Choose Your Format, Level of Discussion**— Discussion is a wonderful way to insure success as you study through this topic. At the same time, some classes are more lecture-oriented, too. So, since each class or small group is unique, use the teaching approach that best fits you and your class. The chapter content and questions at the end of each chapter, along with your own personal study and experience, will guide you as you pray about the strategy you use each week.
  - **Class Format (Light Discussion)**— One option is to use a lecture format and save time for class discussion. Many points in each chapter can be expanded into your main teaching points and also help you guide class discussion.
  - **Small Group Format (More Discussion)**— If you have a small group format or your class is discussion oriented, you can present a 5-7 minute chapter summary and then ask questions from either the end of each chapter, your own insights, or the questions from the group.
3. **Reading Homework**— Strongly encourage class members to read the next chapter of *Rich Toward God* during the week to encourage discussion of the insights they gained.

## DECISION CARD (SAMPLE)

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### **I Want to Be “Rich Toward God”**

*“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God... Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”*

—2 LUKE 12:21,32 (NIV)

Please check the box that applies to your decision today. God bless you!

If you already give at the 10% level, are you willing to increase your level?

Yes  No

If you want to begin giving at the 10% level, are you willing to commit to it now?

Yes  No

If you would like to have others lift your name in prayer about your giving commitment, please sign your name: \_\_\_\_\_

If you want any specific issues prayed about, list them here:

## PRAYER GUIDELINES

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### Prayer Guidelines

The following prayer suggestions identify specific ways that families can pray for themselves and each other in the months following the *Rich Toward God* study. Each suggestion refers to a Scripture to help reinforce the prayer request.

1. Pray to be trusted managers (stewards) of the money we have (Luke 16:10).
2. Pray that we will instill in our children God's principles for giving and money management (Prov. 22:6, Eph. 6:1-2).
3. Pray that we will reject fear and embrace trust in our giving (Prov. 3:9-10).
4. Pray for a sense of expectancy at what God will do (Eph. 3:20-21).
5. Pray that we will discover the joys of giving (2 Cor. 9:7).
6. Pray that we will see more and more of the ways that God is the source of our income (Deut. 8:17-18, 2 Cor. 9:8).
7. Pray that married couples will encourage each other in their giving (Heb. 13:6).
8. Pray that we will hope in God who richly provides (1 Tim. 6:17).

## NEW MEMBER LETTER

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[Date]

Dear [Name]:

I am writing this letter to introduce you to a unique teaching series this congregation completed earlier this year.

We explored an exciting study that has helped us grow in faith as we grow in giving, and we want to share these insights with you. I'm enclosing a copy of an inspiring book on the power of giving, entitled *Rich Toward God* by Dr. Kregg Hood. The biblical study and practical insights in this book have really stretched our thinking. I believe these truths will revolutionize the way you look at giving. No matter what you think about the topic of giving, you will enjoy this book.

We think this book will surprise and encourage you. We have often underestimated God's plan for us, and we want you to see what His Word teaches about His generous response to our giving. We've decided to step out in faith and start trusting the Lord more with our finances.

Please join us as we learn, grow, and receive His rewards together.

In Christian love,

Minister