

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 1—SUNDAY SCHOOL/SMALL GROUP LESSON PLAN

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

“GIVING THAT FEELS GOOD”

At first, probably not many people actually look forward to a study on “giving.”

But think about it for a minute. Who stands to win when we approach the topic with suspicion and prejudice? Who wants to plant the seeds of distortion? Who wants to stop all of us from rethinking and carefully examining the whole subject? We all know who wants to distract, distort, and destroy our commitment to the Lord—Satan.

On the other hand, who has addressed the topic again and again? Jesus. If we follow Jesus, the course is clear. He wants us to study. He wants us to think. He wants us to be fully aware of both the benefit and the danger of our wealth.

INTRODUCE IT

- Honestly, what was your first reaction when you heard about this stewardship study?
Apprehension? Dread? Many Christians are convinced that they can't give to God because of Fear that He won't keep His promises in His Word to provide when we are obedient. Their gifts are often made with wrong motivations. Motivations for giving will be the focus of our study today.
- Why did Jesus make wealth the subject of so many of his parables and sermons?
Our giving acknowledges the Lordship of Christ in our lives and Him as our Source. When we give to God, we are giving of ourselves. After all, we spend so much time in our lives trying to get money. Further, investing in heavenly purposes ensures that it will never be stolen or destroyed (Matthew 6:19-21). It is important to make investments in eternity.

STUDY IT

Motivation #1 Guilt—“I Have to Give”

- As a motive for giving, what are the strengths and weaknesses of “Guilt”?
 1. *Strength: Guilt can be effective in bringing in some money.*
 2. *Weakness: It's actually unbiblical! It brings no joy and doesn't help people outgrow materialism. (Remember, attitudes matter to God.)*

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

Motivation #2 Responsibility—"I Ought to Give" (2 Cor. 8:7)

- As a motive for giving, what are the strengths and weaknesses of "Responsibility"?
 1. *Strength: Because money is given for ministry, this approach feels better than the guilt motivation, and people learn responsibility, which is a healthy character trait.*
 2. *Weakness: Giving solely out of responsibility limits the joy and the amount given considerably. (When people give out of a strictly legalistic approach, it's easy to feel that "I've done my part.")*
- Why is duty often without any real "joy"?

Duty implies an obligation, a lack of choice, and an undesirable sacrifice. Life is so much more fulfilling if we can learn to live with joy and (eternal) purpose!

Motivation #3 Needs—"I Want to Give" (2 Cor. 9:7)

- As a motive for giving, what are the strengths and weaknesses of responding to "Needs"?
 1. *Strength: Giving to satisfy needs feels good.*
 - a. *This kind of giving brings a cheerful heart and doesn't rely on compulsion to force people to give reluctantly.*
 - b. *This motivation touches our heart strings and encourages people to learn the discipline of sacrificial giving.*
 - c. *It can raise larger sums of money and increase involvement because some people give only when they see a need.*
 2. *Weakness: Some people don't approve of or see the "need."*
 - a. *Some will ignore the request, even though there is a need.*
 - b. *The church has ongoing efforts, which may not tug heartstrings.*
- Why does personally responding to a need feel so good?

Responding to a need is great, because you often can immediately see the impact of your gift. This feels great, because the gift has served a purpose, often impacts people's lives directly, and solves a problem.

Motivation #4 Thanksgiving—"I Can't Help but Give" (2 Cor. 9:13)

- As a motive for giving, what are the strengths and weaknesses of "Thanksgiving"?
 1. *Strength: Giving out of thanksgiving feels very good!*
 - a. *This type of giving points our hearts in God's direction since we have a tangible way of showing our thanks to Him.*
 - b. *This unselfish giving encourages others to focus on God's activity in their lives, as well!*
 2. *Weakness: While there is nothing wrong with this motivation for giving, this motivation is limited by our perception of thankfulness.*
 - a. *If we aren't aware of our blessings, we tend to not be as thankful.*
 - b. *Some people can miss the joy of how God has blessed them because they're not paying attention (Luke 17:17).*
- How can generosity be a way of saying "Thank You"?

Being generous can affirm the worth of the person or ministry, as it acknowledges that they are worthy of generosity, or over and above giving, which is a great way to say "thank you."

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

Motivation #5 Worship—"It's My Nature to Give" (2 Cor. 8:5)

- As a motive for giving, what are the strengths of seeing giving as "Worship" to God?

There are only strengths of this motivation.

1. *Worship is the highest possible motivation. It creates true commitment, pleases God, allows much work to be done to advance the cause of His Kingdom, and feels good, too!*
2. *There are no weaknesses in this giving motivation! The devil can't steal your joy in the Lord or stop your work for Christ.*

It's important not to settle for anything less than God's best motivations for our giving. As we grow upward from this motivational game plan, our joy will soar, and our efforts for the Kingdom will expand dramatically.

- When a heart is focused on God, filled with God, and lost in praise to God, what happens to the selfishness in that heart?

As we spend time in God's presence, He has can refine us and burn out impurities, such as selfishness. As we make God our focus, we adopt His desires and priorities as our own.

APPLY IT

- How can we be more trusting of our leaders to apply our gifts to "needs" of which we may be completely unaware?

Believers in the early church had many needs, and in Scripture, we see that leadership and organization were necessary to properly administer benevolence. God is a God of order. The body of Christ has different parts with different gifts (I Corinthians 12:4-8), and some are better suited to this responsibility. We need to submit to our church leadership in implementing established benevolence policies. We should pray for wisdom for our leadership, as they seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit in allocating our gifts (God's money) to meet needs.

- How has this first week of study and reflection changed your thoughts on stewardship?

Do you now think of Excitement, Trust, or Joy? We can trust God to keep His promises in His Word to provide. Knowing this truth can give us Joy in giving!

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 1—SCRIPTURE INDEX

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

CHAPTER ONE—"I WILL MAKE YOU RICH IN EVERY WAY"

2 Corinthians 9:10,11

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important or meaningful thing you learned or read in this chapter?
2. What is your biggest question from this chapter?

LESSON POINTS AND DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. God is the source of all blessings. Read and discuss Philippians 4:19.
2. What is your list of the top 5 or top 10 major blessings in your life?
3. The law of the harvest teaches us that the more you want to reap, the more you have to sow. Read the following passages and discuss their importance and meaning: Genesis 8:22, Galatians 6:7, Matthew 17:20-21, and 2 Corinthians 9:6.
4. God promises rewards to those who are obedient. Read the following passages and discuss their importance and meaning. See Matthew 6:4, Matthew 10:42, Hebrews 11:6, Matthew 6:19-34, Ephesians 6:1-3, and 2 Corinthians 9:11.
5. Discuss these specific rewards:
 - a. You will be rich in every way. God's definition of rich is in 2 Corinthians 9:10-11. (Rich means being "able to be generous.")
 - b. The Bible describes riches as both spiritual and material.
 - c. Read 1 Timothy 6:9,10, Titus 3:14, 1 Chronicles 29:12, Joshua 1:8, Proverbs 3:9,10 and Malachi 3:10.
 - d. You will receive more than you give (Luke 6:38).
 - e. You will receive a greater blessing (Acts 20:36, Galatians 6:7).
6. We receive blessings "in kind"—the type of seed you sow determines the kind of crop you receive. Apply this to Genesis 8:22, Galatians 6:7, Matthew 17:20, 2 Corinthians 9:6, and Luke 6:37.
7. We are to trust God to provide. Read and apply 2 Kings 4:1-7.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION POINT

- If you were to see God as the true source of your blessings, what would be the first financial decision you would make?

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 1—DISCUSSION HANDOUT ANSWER GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

WORD ONE—"I WILL MAKE YOU RICH IN EVERY WAY"

1. Share a moment when you experienced or were impressed with the truth of Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
2. Some Christians feel uncomfortable believing that God wants to bless and reward His children when they obey His Word. How do the following passages from both the Old and New Testaments illustrate that God rewards obedience?

Old Testament

Genesis 15:1 *God rewarded Abram with a son*

1 Samuel 26:23 *David did not harm God's anointed king—Saul—even though he had opportunity. God protected David despite Saul.*

Psalms 62:12 *God promises to reward according to what we have done.*

Proverbs 13:21 *Prosperity is the reward of the righteous.*

Jeremiah 32:19 *God rewards us according to our deeds.*

New Testament

Matthew 6:33 *Serving the Lord should be our first priority.*

1 Corinthians 3:8 *God rewards us according to our labor.*

1 Corinthians 9:23 *We share in spiritual blessings.*

Galatians 6:6,7 *We reap what we sow, whether good or bad.*

Philemon 6 *God rewards obedience with understanding.*

Hebrews 11:6 *By having faith, we can please God, who rewards us.*

3. Read the following passages and identify the general theme of each one.

Passage

Joshua 1:8

Malachi 3:9-11

Proverbs 3:9,10

Luke 6:38

Theme

It is important to meditate on God's Word.

Tithing is critical to avoid financial hardship and to receive financial blessing.

Tithing is a prerequisite to blessing.

The amount of blessing is proportionate to what we give.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

4. God's Word teaches that we should "give to get to give again." (See page 13.) Identify at least one time when you experienced this blessing. What can you do to make this teaching a greater reality in your life?

5. Read the section on receiving "in kind" blessings from God (page 17) and list as many examples of this teaching as you can. Can you think of any biblical exceptions to this principle?

For instance, if you sow corn, you reap corn. If you sow finances, you reap financially. Sometimes, we sow financially or spiritually into someone's life, and we don't see the results (or crop) of what we've sown right away. In some instances, we won't know the impact of what we've sown until Eternity.

6. What advice would you give to Christians who want to see God as the source of their blessings but are afraid to trust Him with financial decisions?

Meditate on the promises in His Word, and spend time with him in prayer and praise so that you can become more like Him and make His priorities your own.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

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LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

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LEADER'S GUIDE

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LESSON 2—SUNDAY SCHOOL/SMALL GROUP LESSON PLAN

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

“THE BLESSING OF TITHING”

So...here we are...the big “T” word. And I don’t mean Tennessee or Texas. I mean “Tithing.” There, I’ve said it. But why have we been so reluctant to say it? Why does it evoke such a wide range of emotions?

Without question, the concept of tithing has been abused by some churches. Some have made it a rigid demand of membership. Others have put it on a “work your way to heaven” list. Many have backed away from teaching about this truth completely. Does this reaction sound familiar?

Somewhere in the fray we need to remember who created the idea, who offered it as a plan, and how well it has worked. God created it. God offered it. And it has worked very well for an uncountable number of families and individual Christians.

Further, tithing is an important foundation for over and above giving that will take place in our capital campaign.

INTRODUCE IT

- Growing up, did you hear much about the word “tithe”? Share your personal experience.
- How was it valued or talked about? Was it discussed positively or negatively, as an obligation, as a spiritual duty, or with gratitude?

STUDY IT

Motivation and Tithing

Last week we discussed the Motivations behind giving.

Guilt	“I have to give.”
Responsibility	“I ought to give.”
Needs	“I want to give.”
Thanksgiving	“I can’t help but give.”
Worship	“It’s my nature to give.”

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

- How can the lower motives of Guilt and Responsibility damage the concept of Tithing?
Guilt isn't biblical. God loves a cheerful giver. The attitude is just as important to God.
- How can the higher motives of Needs, Thanksgiving, and Worship work well with Tithing?
Giving to needs feels good and can have an immediate impact. Giving out of thanksgiving helps align our own attitudes in thankfulness, acknowledging God as the Source of our blessings. Giving as an act of worship is the highest motivation; it creates joy and true commitment and pleases God, as God loves a cheerful giver.

The Heart and the Practice

- When Jesus mimics a tithing Pharisee in Luke 18:12, what is he really speaking against?
He is speaking against pride and spiritual hypocrisy. God cares about the intent of the heart and our relationship with Him, not outward "performances."
- When Jesus rebukes the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23, what is he really criticizing?
He is criticizing their desire to appear spiritual through external acts such as tithing while neglecting justice and mercy and faithfulness, which are reflections of spirituality of the heart.
- With the coming of Jesus, every faith principle took a step forward, not backward. Describe how this affects God's teaching on tithing.
We are now not under the law, but grace. The ten commandments were a benchmark to show us our need for Christ. The Old Testament standard of 10% for tithing was a benchmark—it is only a starting point. The Lord looks on the heart, and His blessings to us will be in proportion to what we sow.

APPLY IT

Tithing was a good plan for God's people then. List the reasons why it can be a good plan today.

- *Tithing symbolizes gratitude to God.*
- *Tithing acknowledges that God owns the whole.*
- *Tithing strengthens our devotion to the Lord.*
- *The discipline of tithing helps eliminate unwise spending habits.*
- *Tithing expands the amount of good we do for the Lord.*
- *Tithing helps us stay on track spiritually. When we put our treasure where God wants it to be, our heart will follow (Matt. 6:21).*
- *Tithing helps support our church home, its ministries, facilities, and pastors. It supports the programs of the church and enables us to reach out to others in the community, whether through benevolence or evangelism.*
- *The giver can receive joy and blessing through the obedience of tithing.*
- *Tithing assures God's blessings, above what we could ask or think.*

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 2— SCRIPTURE INDEX

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

CHAPTER TWO—"I WANT YOU TO TITHE SO I CAN REWARD YOU"

Tithing is an important foundation for over and above giving that will take place in our capital campaign.

Malachi 3:10

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important or meaningful thing you learned or read in this chapter?
2. What is the biggest question you have from this chapter?

LESSON POINTS AND DISCUSSION

1. God releases great blessings to his children who truly follow him. Consider Proverbs 3:9,10.
2. We should trust God in all things.
3. Power Principles of Tithing
 - a. Tithing motivates greater faithfulness. (Use the chart that shows how Jesus always calls for greater faithfulness.)
 - b. Tithing releases God's financial blessings. Read Malachi 3:10.
 - c. Tithing expands Kingdom work. The average percentage of Christian giving is less than 2 percent. Church-wide tithing would allow ministry efforts to virtually explode.
 - d. Tithing changes spending habits.
 - i. You will learn to prioritize.
 - ii. You will learn to budget.
 - iii. You will learn to fight off materialistic urges.
 - iv. You will want to evaluate your spending closely.
 - v. You will see a change in the way you view money.
4. Consider and discuss, as time provides, the following passages:
 - a. Psalm 128:1-4
 - b. Proverbs 10:22
 - c. Proverbs 11:11
 - d. Ephesians 6:1-3
 - e. James 1:12
 - f. Psalm 128:2-4
 - g. Ephesians 6:1-3

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 2—DISCUSSION HANDOUT ANSWER GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

WORD TWO—"I WANT YOU TO TITHE SO I CAN REWARD YOU"

1. How do you react to the statistic that Christians in America give, on the average, 2.5 percent of their income to the Lord's work?
2. If Solomon were writing Proverbs 3:9,10 to you today, how do you think he might word this teaching from the Lord?
Honor God when you first receive your paycheck. Then God will bless you in your workplace and the product of your work, and He will promote you.
3. Before reading this book, what were your views on tithing?
4. Which of the "power principles," which state the benefits of tithing, is the most encouraging to your faith? Why?

Power Principle 1—Tithing motivates greater faithfulness.

Power Principle 2—Tithing releases God's financial blessings.

Power Principle 3—Tithing expands Kingdom work.

Power Principle 4—Tithing changes spending habits.

5. Did the story about the young engineer (pages 36-37) speak to you personally? In what ways?
6. What decisions must a person make in order to "put God to the test" by tithing (Malachi 3:10)?
He must decide to tithe first, despite the circumstances.
7. How can people overcome their fears about tithing?
We must trust God's Word to be true, realize that God will bless us, and give with the right motivations.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 2—DISCUSSION HANDOUT

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LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 3— SUNDAY SCHOOL/SMALL GROUP LESSON PLAN

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

“A PRACTICAL PLAN FOR GENEROUS GIVING”

“Our people were hungry for a plan.” This is what another preacher said about his congregation.

I don't know how “hungry” the Corinthian Christians were for a personal giving plan, but Paul gave them one. I Corinthians 16:1 says, “Now about the collection for God's people: do what I told the Galatian churches to do.” Galatia was a province, a large area of land containing several cities. Paul had given this “plan” to several “churches” (plural) within the province of Galatia, and he now gives it to the Corinthian church. It was a practical plan for generous giving.

This series is about raising up stewards, which is bigger than a campaign. As the book says on pages 51-52, church building projects are among the most frequent occasions when offerings are important. Effective, spiritually motivated churches shy away from making this time a mere fund-raising experience. Instead, they ask their members to pray about “what God wants to give through them.” Since God already owns everything, what could be a more accurate way of looking at giving?

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

INTRODUCE IT

- Several members have said that this series has “changed my mind.”
- Others have said that their families are talking more about giving than ever before.
- Even more important than giving or even a capital campaign, it is most important that we become stewards. A steward acknowledges God as the source and owner of all he has, and recognizes that he is just a manager.
- What has this study done to you and your family? Share your personal experience.

STUDY IT

Vs. 2 “On the first day of every week...”

- Although there may be advantages for the Giver to give monthly or even yearly, what are the advantages for the Church to receive weekly?

It can help the church to more easily meet its obligations when they come due, and the church can also be good stewards of the funds it receives by investing any assets that are not immediately expended, so the assets can multiply.

Vs. 2 “Let each one of you...”

- Why would God expect the poor to give, as well as the middle class and the rich?
Giving is a form of worship. It is important for the poor to acknowledge God as their source. Also, God will bless their sacrifice.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

- How can giving build strong fellowship and unity among believers?
As leadership communicates a need, perhaps a certain building or missions project, they also share the vision, uniting them in vision and purpose. Seeking God corporately to meet needs and corporately agreeing to sacrificially give provides a unity that God will reward.

Vs. 2 “Set aside a sum of money...”

- Why does Paul give such careful instructions about giving?
Because it was a necessity in order for needs to be met efficiently. Back then, they couldn't do wire transfers! Any time finances were to be distributed to churches abroad, they had to be taken personally.
- What attitudes and motives must lie behind this systematic plan?
We must remember that we give to serve the body of Christ and spread the gospel. Everything we do must be done with the goal in mind and with a heart of thanksgiving and worship to God.

Vs. 2 “In keeping with his income...”

- How can this proportional approach work for any income level, in both stable and unstable income circumstances?
The amount isn't important. When we tithe, regardless of the amount, we acknowledge God as our source. Our faithfulness and obedience to the Lord is important. God rewards obedience.
- Since no one but ourselves knows our income what accountability dangers do we face?
Unless we become accountable to someone outside our household, our accountability is only to God, who knows all. We must be careful to not be like the Pharisees and tithe for appearances, so we can say that “We put something in the offering plate on Sunday,” when we know that we are really holding back from God.

APPLY IT

- Think of a time when you were given money when you really needed it. Describe your feelings.
- Think of a time when you gave to someone who really needed it. How did that feel?
- What can each of us do to “emotionally connect” our offering in the Sunday collection plate with the real needs that the collection will go to?

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 3— SCRIPTURE INDEX

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

CHAPTER THREE—“I TRUST YOU TO MANAGE MATERIAL RESOURCES”

This series is about raising up stewards, which is bigger than a campaign. As the book says on pages 51-52, church building projects are among the most frequent occasions when offerings are important. Effective, spiritually motivated churches shy away from making this time a mere fund-raising experience. Instead, they ask their members to pray about “what God wants to give through them.” Since God already owns everything, what could be a more accurate way of looking at giving?

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important or meaningful thing you learned or read in this chapter?
2. What is the biggest question you have from this chapter?

LESSON POINTS AND DISCUSSION

1. God owns everything. See Psalm 50:10-12.
2. God has given us the abilities we have to make a living. Discuss Deuteronomy 8:17,18.
3. We are managers of what God has given us. Discuss Luke 16:10.
4. Decide to give to the Lord this Sunday and every Sunday. How might you plan to give “tithes and offerings” (Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 16:1,2, Romans 15:4, 2 Timothy 3:17).
5. Give to the Lord first. Discuss the importance of tithing to your home congregation, then giving extra offerings as the Lord prompts your heart. Read and discuss Proverbs 3:9-10, 2 Corinthians 8:7, and Exodus 25:2.
6. Remember your motives. Discuss how giving tithes and offerings are a doorway to God’s blessings as well as a tremendous checkpoint to monitor the level of your obedience.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 3—CLASS DISCUSSION HANDOUT ANSWER GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

WORD THREE—"I TRUST YOU TO MANAGE MATERIAL RESOURCES"

1. Read each passage about God's Kingdom and contrast it with the world's mind-set:

1 Chronicles 29:12 *Wealth and honor come from God, and He has the power to exalt. Our society is very humanistic and entrenched in the belief that we should be self reliant and ambitious.*

Psalms 50:9,10 *Our humanistic society is very self-centered and materialistic. To imagine that God requires our obedience through tithing and giving, but in His wealth really doesn't need it is a foreign concept to us. Why would someone give up something of value to someone who really doesn't need it?*

Proverbs 3:9,10 *To say that we will have earthly blessings by giving away the first fruits to God is a paradox in earthly terms, but it is a spiritual principle of the universe.*

Proverbs 10:22 *God is the owner of everything, so wealth is a blessing that God bestows. God does not add sorrow with wealth. Sorrow can result with wealth when we disobey God's Word and do not acknowledge Him as our Source.*

1 Timothy 6:6-10 *The Kingdom of God is eternal, whereas wealth is temporal. As such, we should seek His Kingdom, and not pursue wealth, which has many snares.*

2. How does giving help us become more like God? Why did God create a world that calls on us to give in order to meet needs?

Giving forces us to put His priorities ahead of our own. Giving can be a catalyst for internal change and spiritual growth as we seek Him and consider His priorities. Meeting the needs of others shows the world that God and His people care for them.

3. When Christians really take Psalm 50:10 to heart, how will it affect their views on material possessions?

What we "own" isn't really ours; it belongs to God. This truth can be freeing and relieve the burdens that money (whether wealth or need) can bring.

4. As you read these three passages, focus on the attitudes you think that God wants His children to develop. List as many as you can.

Malachi 3:10 *Boldness, confidence in God's promises*

Luke 6:38 *Generosity*

2 Corinthians 9:6-12 *Hard work, diligence, cheerfulness, gratefulness*

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

5. Discuss the steps people need to take with each giving decision to maximize their effectiveness as managers of God's resources. What wisdom might God be trying to give you in order to determine this (James 1:5)?

For gifts above our tithe, we need to make sure that the recipient of the gift is "good soil," and will be a good steward of our gift.

Decision 1—Give to the Lord this Sunday.

Decision 2—Give to the Lord every Sunday.

Decision 3—Give "tithes and offerings."

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 3—CLASS DISCUSSION HANDOUT

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

WORD THREE—"I TRUST YOU TO MANAGE MATERIAL RESOURCES"

1. Read each passage about God's Kingdom and contrast it with the world's mind-set:

1 Chronicles 29:12

Psalm 50:9,10

Proverbs 3:9,10

Proverbs 10:22

1 Timothy 6:6-10

2. How does giving help us become more like God? Why did God create a world that calls on us to give in order to meet needs?
3. When Christians really take Psalm 50:10 to heart, how will it affect their views on material possessions?
4. As you read these three passages, focus on the attitudes you think that God wants His children to develop. List as many as you can.

Malachi 3:10

Luke 6:38

2 Corinthians 9:6-12

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

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LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 4— SUNDAY SCHOOL/SMALL GROUP LESSON PLAN

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

“THE JOY OF GENEROSITY”

This has been an amazing month. Every few days I find myself with another church member who wants to talk about how this stewardship study is affecting them. And no one has complained yet! Challenged? Yes. Struggling? Yes. But every comment has been positive. The vast majority have said that they are encouraged and growing. They are hearing each other's stewardship stories for the first time in small groups, restaurants after church, and conversations in the parking lot. Many are making major changes in their personal giving plans. A new light of “insight” has been turned on in our minds.

This week, in our groups, we will see the generosity of God, the two sides of wealth, and the amazing example of the early church. It looks like we're in for more challenges.

INTRODUCE IT

- Which is easier for you to give: your time, your money, or your things? Explain.

STUDY IT

A Lesson from Solomon

Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-2.

- Give the typical American definition of “economical.”
For some Americans, “economical” means anything that we want or need at a reasonable price. For others, “economical” means purchasing only what you absolutely need.
- Using this definition, describe what would have to change in our world if we were more “economical” in regard to nature, relationships, spirituality, size, color, etc. Use your imagination.
Christians think of every “economical” decision as a statement of value. What do I (we) value—in light of eternity? We will want to pay attention to the “price” we pay financially, relationally, and spiritually. The goal will be to enjoy material possessions (cars, homes, vacations, clothes, etc.), learn to be content with what we have (without continually wanting more), and be willing to share with others whenever and wherever we can.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

- On the other hand, what would change in our world if humanity learned to “cast their bread,” release, and become as generous as God?

Besides meeting many physical needs in the world, our generosity would help us to become more spiritually minded, as we evaluate our priorities and move our focus from that of selfishness to that of others.

A Lesson from Jesus

Read Matthew 6:19-21.

- Why is wealth used as a measure of success today?
Wealth can buy many things that can be seen, held, touched, felt, and enjoyed. Wealth often visibly distinguishes a person from others in externals.

- Using practical, “how to” language, describe what it means to “store up treasure in heaven”?

I can contribute to ministries that are making a difference. I can witness and introduce others to Christ. I can encourage others and invest personally in the lives of those who are hurting.

A Lesson from the Early Church

Read Acts 2:44-45; 4:32.

- What word would you use to describe how these first Christians shared with each other (Radical, Cultish, Beautiful, Exciting, _____)? Explain your choice.
- Why did they do such a good job of taking care of each other?
They shared with each other liberally because they were unified in Christ and in purpose. They viewed themselves as a body—a team, working together towards a common goal (to share Christ). They valued each other highly, like Christ did the church.

APPLY IT

- Where do you see most of the caregiving taking place at church (Sunday Services, Small Groups, Ministry Staff, Other Leadership Groups, etc.)? Elaborate.
- If you were in need, where would you go first (Family, Small Group, Ministry Staff, etc.)? Why?

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 4— SCRIPTURE INDEX

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

CHAPTER FOUR—"I WILL HELP YOU GIVE MORE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE"

2 Corinthians 8:7

But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important or meaningful thing you learned or read in this chapter?
2. What is the biggest question you have from this chapter?

LESSON POINTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does God want his people to give?
2. Read 2 Kings 3:4-20 and discuss the parallels to God's plan for his people today.
3. Read the following passages.
 - a. 2 Corinthians 8:7-11
 - b. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7
 - c. Galatians 6:6-7
 - d. Ephesians 3:20-21
4. What attitudes does God desire us to have about giving?
5. What results are promised in these passages?
6. Discuss the importance of making a Faith Budget.

PRAYER TIME

Spend a good amount of time in prayer.

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

LESSON 4—CLASS DISCUSSION HANDOUT ANSWER GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

WORD FOUR—"I WILL HELP YOU GIVE MORE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE"

1. Why does God want His people to give?
Giving to the Lord helps keep our hearts sensitive to God's priorities and helps us serve by doing His work. Giving is a natural response of gratitude and trust and helps prevent materialism from taking hold in our hearts.
2. Read 2 Kings 3:4-20, a fascinating story of God's partnership with His people. Note what God asked the Israelites to do. How much of God's provision was determined by the work the people did? Discuss the parallels to God's plan for His people today.
God said that he would provide water, but the Israelites had to dig ditches to hold the blessing that was promised. For them to receive God's blessing, they had to believe and act before they could receive God's promise.
3. Read the following passages and identify attitudes God wants us to have about giving specifically, as well as God's provision in general. What results are promised in these passages?

2 Corinthians 8:7-11 God wants us to excel in giving and be sincere and eager to give and complete the work.

2 Corinthians 9:6,7 We should give generously and cheerfully. As a result, we will reap generously, and God will have joy in us, as he loves a cheerful giver.

Ephesians 3:20,21 By having His power at work within us, he can do immeasurably above what we could ask or imagine.
4. Imagine yourself as a member of the congregation in Henry Blackaby's story (pages 59-61). Would your response to the committee's decision create a "crisis of belief" for you? Why?
5. How can we overcome crises of belief in our finances?
Trust God, sow faithfully, wait patiently, and enjoy God's blessings when they come!

LEADER'S GUIDE

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LESSON 4—CLASS DISCUSSION HANDOUT

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LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

(OPTIONAL)

LESSON 5— SUNDAY SCHOOL/SMALL GROUP LESSON PLAN

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD

“TAKING GOD AT HIS WORD—PERMANENTLY”

What now???

How many times have you asked this question or reached this point? You've had a wonderful experience, a life-changing conversation, or a challenging encounter. And now, as it ends, you're left with these obvious questions: “What should I do now?” “Where do I go next?” “How do I keep what I've learned?” These are the kind of questions being asked by those who have been touched and changed by our stewardship study.

This week, in our groups, we are considering three major questions: “What Have We Learned?” “How Will We Follow?” and “What Makes It ‘Permanent?’” Our goal is to share ideas about how we can extend the experience of the last four weeks throughout the entire year. We want to know how we can *Take God at His Word*—permanently.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

- What have you learned, and what has challenged you in the last four weeks of study and thinking?

HOW WILL WE FOLLOW?

Are We Only Curious?

Read John 6:1-2.

- Why are the crowds following Jesus? What do they want from him?
They want to be healed, and they believe that He can heal them. They want to get something from Him.
- What emotion do you think fills Jesus as he sees this crowd of 5,000?
- *He likely feels compassion, and perhaps sorrow that most are there only to receive and not give their lives to follow Him.*

LEADER'S GUIDE

TAKE GOD AT HIS WORD: EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF GIVING

- What would you be feeling? What would be your hopes and dreams for them?
- How would you then feel to discover just how many have come simply for what they can get?

Are We Convinced, But on Our Own Terms?

Read John 6:14.

- How did the people respond to Jesus' miracle? What did they conclude about him?
They concluded that he was a prophet, which acknowledges that God's hand was on him, but it does not say that they concluded that He was the Messiah.
- When he "withdrew...to a mountain by himself to pray" (Mark 6:46), what is he most likely praying about?
He knows His destiny, which is the cross, and He knows that before that time, there is much to do to awaken the people spiritually to follow Him. In the meantime, the demands of the people are physically draining on Him, so He also needs God's strength to endure.

Are We Committed to Follow God on His Terms?

Read John 6:66-69.

- Why did so many of Jesus' followers leave?
His teaching was too difficult and required more of them than they were willing to pay.
- Why did The Twelve stay?
They stayed because they knew that Jesus was the Holy one of God.

WHAT MAKES IT PERMANENT?

- For some, our stewardship study has only aroused their curiosity. Why?
Curiosity does not accept something as truth (like God's promises). Curiosity implies that they still must investigate to evaluate its truth and value.
- Others are convinced that they should give, but they want to be sure that their contribution supports their own agenda. Why?
Some still struggle with the motivation that they will get something out of what they give. Their motivation for giving is misguided.
- Many have said that the past four weeks have made them even more committed to trusting God with what they give. How do they differ from the first two groups?
They believe God's promises to be true and are willing to seek God for faith and direction and submit to His priorities.