

TO GIVE IS TO ADD TO YOUR WEALTH!

Today's Text: Proverbs Chaps 11 and 13

Extracts:

- 1. *There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself [Prov. 11: 24-25]***
- 2. *There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches [Prov. 13: 7]***

*With an estimated weekly audience of 30 million viewers, the **Oprah Winfrey Show** is the most watched talk show on American television, a feat that it has maintained for almost all the 19 seasons of its existence. It is also syndicated to more than 100 other countries around the world. At the beginning of its 19th season in September 2004, Oprah surprised her studio audience that had been carefully selected on the basis of their pressing needs sent in by their relatives. The all-women audience did not know what awaited them. Oprah gave each of the 276 women a Pontiac G6 sports sedan as a gift! The total value of the cars came to US\$7 million.¹*

Oprah could not have given away those cars for tax purposes because the manufacturers, General Motors, which saw a unique opportunity to promote its new model, donated them all. The total cost of the cars amounted to 50 prime time television adverts, which might not make as much impact as that gesture on the Oprah Winfrey Show! Oprah's antecedence may best explain her motive. Her Angel Network, established in September 1997 has raised US\$17 million to build rural schools in 10 developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In all cases, she pays 100% of all the funds raised to charity and covers the administrative costs from her own funds.² Oprah is listed as one of the richest people in the world.

To maintain a Number One talk show for almost two decades in a highly competitive market takes more than talent. Whether it is Oprah or General Motors, giving has added to their wealth, however they may define it. What lessons do we learn from that story? How can we also give so as to add to our wealth? Those are some of the issues that we shall examine in today's study.

¹ 'Oprah gives away 276 cars,' www.sundaytimes.co.za

² www.oprah.com/uyl/uyl_angel_about.jhtml

1. What does wealth mean to you?

Think of two people in dissimilar circumstances. Mr. A is homeless and lives under a busy highway bridge where mosquitoes feed on him every night. His meals come from the garbage dumps and for a pillow he uses a cement block picked from a nearby construction site. Yet, every night, he sleeps very soundly. Ms. B, on the other hand, is filthy rich. She is a successful banker who lives in the affluent part of the city. She can eat whatever she wants and drives the latest models of cars. Yet, every night, she needs tranquilizers in order to fall asleep on her feather bed! Which of the two is wealthier than the other?

The answer that you give may depend on your circumstances. For most of us on the struggling side, we may say, “give me the money and leave me to worry about sleep!” That suggests that wealth means different things to different people. In general, it can mean all or some or one of the following:

a) *Net worth*

Net worth is the balance between what we own (assets) and what we owe (liabilities). It is measured in terms of the size of our bank accounts or investments or material possessions. Surplus suggests that we have more than we need. In practice, we know that that hardly happens. Billionaires still work and, without credit cards, the rest of us could starve!

Most people pursue material wealth through illegitimate and/or immoral means. People kill or cheat or steal or prostitute to gain material wealth. We have heard of the *mafia*, the drug lords and such like gangsters. We have heard of corrupt politicians who steal from poor countries and hide their loot in Europe or America. Such people are so busy covering their tracks that they tend to be selfish and uncaring about the needy. In the end, “wealth gathered by dishonesty will be diminished” [**Prov. 13: 11**], and God gives to the sinner “the work of gathering and collecting that he may give to him who is good before God” [**Eccl. 2: 26**].

On the other hand, there are some people who are honest in their pursuit of material success. They keep accumulating and acquiring and hardly care about helping the less privileged. However, because it is a moving target, they never get there! Meanwhile, they may need to protect from envious eyes and thieves what they have made. As a result, they hardly have any peace of mind. Between heart problems and cancer, such people’s longevity is prematurely determined. That is why Jesus warned His disciples “life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing” [**Lk 12: 23**]. In other words, we are more than our net worth.

b) *Self worth*

The word of God says, “a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches; loving favour rather than silver and gold” [Prov. 22:1]. Therefore, our *self worth* exceeds our net worth. What is a good name? At the human level, it is the favourable impression that we have made on others through our words and deeds.

Intellectual property is a modern concept that can be used to summarize our self-worth. It has a huge market value for some people, and they work extremely hard to protect it, to the extent that it becomes their god! Yet, “to seek one’s own glory is not glory” [Prov. 25: 27]. Instead, “let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” [Prov. 27: 2]. Therefore, wealth defined in terms of self-worth cannot last nor increase because it is anchored on selfishness and self-aggrandizement for “he who lays up treasure for himself ... is not rich toward God” [Lk 12: 21].

c) *True worth*

The only true wealth is the one that comes from God for “the blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it” [Prov. 10:22]. It is God who gives us power to get wealth *for His purpose* [Deut. 8: 17-18]. He is not interested in our outward show but in what is in our hearts [1 Sam. 16: 7]. Therefore, only God knows our true worth. He has told us that the only way that we can build lasting wealth, whether material or spiritual, is to give! That is the theme that we shall examine presently.

2. The giving that adds to wealth

The word of God says, “there is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty” [Prov. 11: 24]. Somehow, we are all givers. After all, we give away leftover foods and dirt to the garbage cans each day! Some of us clear our wardrobes of old clothes, bags and shoes and give them to younger siblings or charities. Interestingly, doing those things opens up our stores or wardrobes to receive *more and better* items! But, does any of those qualify for the kind of giving that adds to wealth? No! The wealth in the above Bible reference is true wealth that only comes from God who has promised us, “he who has pity on the poor *lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given*” [Prov. 19: 17]. Therefore, here are some of the important conditions of giving to qualify for true wealth:

a) *It must be something precious to you!*

When you give away what is useless to you, that is not giving but house cleaning! It must be something that you also *need* for yourself. When David needed Araunah’s threshing floor to build an altar to God, he offered it freely to the king. David refused, saying, “No, but I will surely

buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing” [2 Sam. 24: 24]. It was in that same spot that Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem many years later [2 Chron. 3: 1]. It cost David something and God added to his true wealth for “a good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children” [Prov. 13: 22].

A farmer best illustrates this concept. During planting season, he plants the seeds that he has stored, no matter how badly he and his family may need them for immediate consumption. He waters the seeds and waits patiently for them to sprout, grow and produce fruits. Some months later, each seed yields more grains than had been planted. Jesus used the analogy to illustrate His death when He said, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain” [Jn 12: 24].

Hannah was barren. She prayed to God for a son that she vowed to dedicate to God’s service all his life. Her prayer was answered and she bore Samuel. After weaning him, she gave him to Eli the priest for God’s service, saying, “I also have lent him to the Lord, as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord.” God paid her back with three other sons and two daughters [1 Sam. 1: 9-28; 2:21]! She gave away her only precious son and five more children were added to her family. That is true wealth.

b) *Give to those who cannot give you back!*

Most people give on a quid-pro-quo basis. As they are receiving with one hand, they are giving with the other hand to the same people. Some of us give as a kind of investment, to curry favour from a boss or an organization. That is not the kind of giving that God is talking about. Rather, it is when you give to those who cannot pay you back. That is what becomes a lending to the Lord.

Remember the story of the Jewish maid to Naaman’s wife. Naaman was a mighty man of valour but he was a leper. I doubt if his wife enjoyed being called the leper’s wife! In her quiet moments, she would have prayed and wished for her husband’s recovery but there was no respite. There is evidence that she had treated the slave girl well, otherwise she would not have revealed it to her to send her husband to the prophet Elisha in Samaria who “would heal him of his leprosy” [2 Kgs 5: 1-5]. Naaman’s wife had raised the Jewish maid as a member of her family, and she became her daughter so to speak [Prov. 29: 21]. The Lord paid her back by healing her husband of his leprosy through the information provided by the poor girl who had been shown love in a foreign land. Now, she was proud to be called Naaman’s wife. That is true wealth.

Jesus underlined this point when He told the Pharisees [LK 12: 12-13]:

When you give a dinner or supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you will be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you: for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

c) *Give willingly and cheerfully!*

Paul has admonished everyone to “give as he purposes in his heart, *not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves the cheerful giver*” [2 Cor. 9: 7]. What is it that we have that does not already belong to God? Is He not the maker of heaven and earth and “they that dwell therein” [Ps. 24: 1]? When we are reluctant to give, we are like a child who refuses to pay for lunch for his estranged younger sister and yet he depends on his father’s weekly allowance for his own sustenance!

You do not have to give if you do not want to. However, once you choose to do so, it has to be done willingly and cheerfully because “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, *always having all sufficiency in all things*, may have an abundance for every good work” [2 Cor. 9: 8]. Moreover, “the generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself” [Prov. 11: 25]. See the joy of the people of Israel in David’s day: “Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered *willingly*, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly to the Lord; and King David also rejoiced greatly” [1 Chron. 29: 9]. Joy is true wealth in deed!

Many of us lose the blessings that go with giving because they are selfish! They have no problem paying tithe on one dollar (only ten cents). But, let them earn one million dollars that carries a tithe of \$100,000. That is when the problem begins! They begin to think of how many cars that they could buy with that huge sum, how much deposit for a Malibu home that could give, etc. That is when they question the integrity of their pastors or church elders. In the end, even when they still pay, because it has not been done willingly and cheerfully, God is not keen to open the windows of heaven and “pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” [Mal. 3: 10]. You then find that “you have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; ...and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes” [Hag. 1: 6].

3. Conclusion: learn to give God’s way!

The only giving that adds to your wealth is the one that is done God’s way for “each one’s praise will come from God” [1 Cor. 4: 5]. Those things that you

value so much (money, time, wisdom, good character and good example, integrity, high position, good job, etc) come from God and He has given them to you according to your capacity to *add value* to them for His glory. The blessings that go with doing so God's way are summarized in the words of Jesus, as follows [Lk 6: 38]:

Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall men put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

When you give, you are not squandering. Instead, you are laying a solid foundation for your own wealth, material, earthly or eternal. You are imitating God's love for the world. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" [Jn 3: 16]. Love is kind, does not seek its own and never fails [1 Cor. 13: 4, 5, 8]. Therefore, your giving will add value to your true wealth and will never fail. Consider the following simple rules:

- *Don't wait to give only when you have because you may never have enough!* If others had treated you the same way, you might have lost the opportunities that have now placed you where you are in life today. Therefore, give because somebody needs it more than you do at this particular point in time;
- *It is not only money or material things that you can give.* How about advice and guidance or your time or your service or your turn?
- *The person that you may turn back may be a bearer of good news for your own good.* For example, had Abraham not received and entertained three strangers, he would have turned away the Lord and two angels who had brought the good news of Isaac's coming birth [Gen. 18: 1-15]. Therefore, don't be tired of giving unless you are tired of receiving;
- *Pay your tithes and vows as regularly and as cheerfully as possible so that you can reap God's promises that go with doing so [Mal. 3: 8-10].* However, don't question how your contributions are spent because you don't know how government spends the taxes that you pay!

As you give *God's way* this Christmas, may He add value to your true wealth.