

The Journey to Biblical Manhood

Challenge 8: Money

Session 2: What If God Told You Money *Can* Buy Happiness?

Unedited Transcript

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Welcome to the Man in the Mirror: Men's Bible Study. If you would please, turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter five, and we'll start at verse 18. We are in this series, the journey to biblical manhood. We're going to start today with a shout out to a group that has joined us, they're the "Men's 730 Bible Study Group". They're led by David. David, I'm going to pronounce your last name McKelvey, but I was thinking about it, there're probably about three or four different ways to pronounce it, so if I did that wrong, I'm sorry. David McKelvey, this group is in Killen, Alabama. About a dozen guys, they meet on Wednesdays at 7:30 AM. They've been meeting for four years, they're comprised of strong, Christian men with hearts to grow and multiply in discipleship by starting other groups.

Kind of sounds a little bit like Man in the Mirror Bible Study. Welcome, we're really glad to have you with us. Would you join me in giving a very warm and a rousing welcome to the 730 Bible Study Group?

One, two, three. Hoo-rah. Welcome, guys. We're so glad to have you a part of the Bible study. All right. Yeah. The journey to biblical manhood. Today, we are in the second week of our eighth challenge on money. The faith and life objectives, the cards are on the table. We're going to be focusing in on the heart piece this week, the second bullet. I will love God more than possessions and be a cheerful steward. What if God told you that money can buy happiness? That's the title of the message today.

We're going to start at Ecclesiastes chapter five, verse 18. Read along silently with me if you would. "Then I realize that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him. For this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot, and be happy in his work, this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart."

Is there anybody here who would like to be this guy? All of us would love to be this man, would we not? What is this lot in life that he's talking about? John 10:10, Jesus says, "I came that you might have life, and might have it abundantly." Couple of weeks ago, when we were talking about mission, we talked about the idea of abiding in Christ versus striving for Christ. We looked at John chapter 15, and there was this idea that the man who abides in Christ obeys him. The love of Jesus will abide in him, and his joy will be made full.

We had a man come here one time who told me that he and his wife who had no children, lived in a 7000 square foot home, and they had all kinds of other possessions and moneys. He was depressed. His wife said to him, said, "Why are you so depressed? We have everything we could possibly want." He said, "We don't have anything." We don't have anything.

I want to tell you this morning the tale of two men. The first of those men is very much like the guy I just described. Turn with me to Luke chapter 18. We're done in Ecclesiastes. Luke chapter 18, and by the way, if you're not one of these people who can buzz around in the Bible, that's fine. You just feel free to listen. Luke chapter 18, verse 18. By the way, this story is not a parable, it's an historical account, this story is in Matthew, Mark and Luke. There're three different replications of this story, each of them telling essentially the same story, but with a few details that are different.

We're looking at the passage in Luke. "A certain ruler asked Jesus, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" What are these from? These are right out of the 10 commandments. You will remember, perhaps you know it right now, but you'll remember when I remind you, that there are four commandments that deal with our relationship with God, don't worship false gods, don't make idols, don't take the Lord's name in vain and keep the sabbath. The other six are more horizontal and deal with our relationships with people.

It's interesting, it is interesting, that here, Jesus refers to those horizontal commandments. The man says in verse 21, "All these, I have kept since I was a boy." Then in the Matthew version, the man goes on to say, "What do I still lack?" Now, it's interesting, don't you think that a man who had kept all these commandments still has this intuitive sense that something's lacking in his life. He's a good man. He's a righteous man. There are moral men all over our community, all over the communities of those of you who're watching online, or listening online.

There are moral men in our communities, they're righteous men. They're not committing adultery, they're not stealing, they're not defrauding. They are honoring their parents. They're doing all these things, and yet, they still feel like something must be missing. What's wrong with you? We have it all. We don't have anything. There's this intuitive sense that something is still missing.

Then Jesus, when he heard this, and by the way, the Mark passage says that when Jesus heard this, he looked at him, and he loved him. It's the agape kind of love, Jesus loved him. He saw this man in this conundrum of being a righteous man, a moral man, a good man. A good man. He said this man in this dilemma of leading a righteous life, and yet, feeling depressed, like something was missing. He loved him. Jesus said, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me."

When he heard this, he was very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Then Jesus looked at him and said the verse that I referred to briefly last week, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Now, there are some people standing around observing all this, and when they heard that, they said, then who can be saved? Who can be saved?

Jesus said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Peter, Peter, who is our spokesperson, asks all the questions we really want to ask, he said, "We've left everything to follow you. What do we get?" Jesus said, "I tell you the truth. No one who has left home or a wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come, eternal life, the word of God."

What's going on here? It sounds to me like you can buy salvation. Is that what it sounds like to you? At first blush, it might. You will notice that in this text, that the selling of everything is not the positive thing that gains the salvation for the man. It's the removal of the obstacle that's keeping him from following Jesus. This verse is a conundrum to many men, and me for a while, but I spent a lot of time on this in years' past.

That's it. It's not the adding of the good work, it's not about doing a good work that gains you salvation, it's about removing the obstacle that's keeping you from that full surrender. Jesus says that this is how you get to the kingdom. The come follow me. Follow me, that's how you get into the kingdom. But, you have something that is an obstacle, that is keeping you from following me. He said, "Come follow me," and the man did what? He went away sad. Because why? Because he had great wealth, it was the money that was the obstacle, that was keeping him from the surrender to Jesus. It was not the positive thing that he was getting ready to do, the additional righteous thing, to keeping all these other commandments, there was finally going to be enough to earn him salvation. That was not it. It was the thing that was keeping him from a full surrender to the lordship of Jesus.

That's one man. It's interesting. Jesus knows each of us. He knows what has arrested our affections. He knows what has arrested your affections. That's the thing that he's going to ask you to surrender to him. Now, if this man had been addicted to pornography, which is one of the big issues in our culture today, then that's the thing that Jesus would address. We're talking about money, and in this case, it's money. Materialism is just another word for idolatry. Money idolatry. Materialism is just ...

Of course, I'm a recovering materialist, so I have plenty of credentials to talk about this. Once a materialist, always a materialist. I still, I love nice things. I think I keep a pretty good balance of it. Ever since Amazon Prime came out, man, I'm right back in it. My wife said to me last week, she said, "Do I need to freeze your Amazon account?" I said, no, but I was thinking, yeah, please, do it.

I'm on an Amazon Prime fast right now. Because it's the thing that distracts me from that full total complete surrender to the lordship of Jesus. Little bit anyway. That's one man. We saw what happened. What would've happened? What would've happened if he'd have sold everything? We don't know exactly what would've happened in his life, but we do know that he would've come to Jesus and that we also know from all the passages, that Jesus would've given him an abundant life.

Perhaps, who knows, perhaps Jesus would say, "Okay," he's got everything up on auction, and just before the gavel goes down, Jesus says, "Okay, I believe you. You keep it now, but use it for my glory." He could've done that, right? Could've done it anyway, or, you know what I'm saying.

Now, let's take a look at a second man, which is in the 19th chapter, at verse one, and this is the man Zacchaeus. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through, and a man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, and was wealthy. He was Jewish, but he had basically sold out to the Romans, and was extolling higher taxes than probably were warranted from the people. Oh my

gosh, that just sounds like our country. Just kidding. I don't think we pay too much in taxes personally. Lot of people do. Not a big deal. Just differences of opinion.

Verse three. "He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man," physically short, "he could not because of the crowd. He ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because Jesus was coming his way." It's really interesting that he was willing to go out on a limb to see Jesus. Verse five, "When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and he said, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.'" Jesus, first Samuel, 16:7, says, "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart." This is with the selection of David to be the next king out of the sons, seven sons.

It says that God looks on the heart, man looks on the outward appearance. Jesus was looking on his heart, when he said, "Hey, come down, I'm going to be with you today." He saw something. He saw his guy out on a limb, he said man, this guy's going out on a limb to see me, I want to spend some time with him, but he also saw right into his heart.

Just remember, when we're talking about these things today, you're probably thinking if you're like me, this is human nature, we think about all the people whether are like this that we know, that shouldn't be like that. We judge them. What first Samuel 16:7 tells us, is that since we look on the outward appearance, that we have obstructed view seating in other men's lives. We have obstructed view seating I another man's life.

I'm thinking about one guy right now who I set years and years and years thinking about him with ill feelings or, not feelings, but I had a bad opinion of him. But, then many years later, I've learned that he was one of these men who believed very strongly about the idea of not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing, and is giving. I learned that he was extremely generous, and he was extremely generous to poor people, and he was extremely generous to poor people by giving it secretly and privately and anonymously to them. I happened to discover that almost by accident, but I had obstructed view seating of him for years.

Of course, then I repeated that. I think God allowed me to have a long time of thinking of him in a wrong way so that it'd be more explosive to me when the epiphany came. It did change, it actually changed the way I look at everybody. I actually look at everybody, that woman walking right there, that guy right out there, you right over there, I look at everybody differently now.

I was telling a guy I had breakfast with, he was a younger guy, I'm in my 60s. The waitress is 23. I just said to her, I said, "You know, you are so beautiful." She walked away and he said, "You know she is, but you can get away with that. I couldn't say that." I said, yeah, but I said, I look at her and I see her beauty, but the first thing that actually comes ... The beauty came to mind first, but the next thing on my mind is that I wonder where she is on her spiritual journey. I wonder where she is on her spiritual ...

This is just a way of looking ... That all happened because of obstructed view seating with one man, that I now think about, I wonder what the state of her soul is. I wonder where she is. Here's this guy, Zacchaeus, and in verse five, "'I must come and stay at your house today.' He came down at once, and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this, and they began to mutter." Mutter, mutter, mutter. You got people who're really close to Christ and doing a great, you have people who are in the kingdom, and the mutterers, and then you have the people that are outside.

These are people muttering. He has gone to be the guest of a center, but Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, here and now I give," watch this, "half of my possessions to the poor." Let's just stop there. I give half of my possessions to the poor. Just think about what you own, and just think about taking half of that, giving away half of everything that you have to the poor.

This is a guy ... What if God told you money can buy happiness? He did tell the rich young ruler, hey, money can buy you happiness. Get rid of it, and you'll be happy. Watch what happens here. "Look, Lord, here now I give half my possessions to the poor. If I've cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay them back four times the amount." This man has just committed a fortune. Because Jesus came into his life.

Jesus said to him, and watch this, "Today, salvation has come to this house." What if God told you money can buy happiness? Guess what? Through generosity, this man revealed externally an internal change of heart that had taken place. Jesus said, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham, that the son of man came to seek and to save what is lost."

You have this tale of two men. What you see here is that actually, money can contribute to our happiness when we use it for the glory of God. Money can prevent us from being happy when we don't use it for the glory of God. There is a sense in which it can, and of course there's a sense in which it can't, let's take a look at big idea today.

The Big Idea of the day is a question. **Have you ever known a generous man who was not fundamentally happy with his lot in life?** Have you? Have you ever actually personally known a man who had a spirit of generosity, a tither, basically, a tither plus, have you ever know a man, and I would define a generous man as a minimum of 10%. At least 10%.

Here's the deal. It's not that we give God 10% of our money. It's that God lets us keep 90% of his money. You see how that works, right? A generous man, I would define as somebody who's doing a tithe or more. Have you ever known one of those men who's not fundamentally happy with his lot in life? That's what we're talking about at the very beginning, Ecclesiastes. Wouldn't we like to be that man, who is glad with our lot in life?

I say fundamentally happy, because nobody's happy all the time. You know what I'm talking about. There are times when you feel the weight of the world, but, if you have a spirit of generosity, even in those times when you feel like your head's in a vice, and your body's being crushed by one of those machines that crush cars, still, there's this underlying fundamental satisfaction or happiness or joy or peace or whatever you want to call it, contentment, with your lot.

This is a cluster, you see. Happiness, it's a cluster of a lot of words. I just used most of them. It's a cluster. Fundamentally happy or satisfied with your lot in life. Even in difficult times. What does it mean then to be generous?

Let's turn to second Corinthians chapter eight. Second Corinthians chapter eight. Let's look at verse 12. Second Corinthians chapter eight, verse 12. What does it mean to be generous? If you have money, it can be money, if you don't have money, it doesn't have to be money, I remember the story one time about a man who was walking down the street eating some green grapes. He walked by a man who was begging for money. He was really enjoying the grapes, he took a few steps, and he sensed the Lord telling him to offer those green grapes to that beggar. He thought to himself, "I'm really hungry and

these are really good grapes. I don't really want to give these green grapes to this beggar. But, Lord, if that's what you want me to do, then I'll offer my green grapes to this beggar."

He turned around, he went back and he said, "Hey, man, you interested in having these green grapes?" The guy said, "Yeah, I'll take them." He gave them to him and he went on his way. He said, "I have no idea what that was about. I have no idea what that was about." Said, "but I don't need to know. I don't need to know." He was just being what? He was being generous. He was giving what he could. That's what this text here says.

Watch this. "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable. According to what one has, not according to what he does not have." You remember this story perhaps in the book of Acts, Peter is going up with his associate, I can't remember, James, John, somebody. Peter's going up, and there's a beggar, and the beggar looks up at Peter when he speaks to him, and expecting something. Peter says, "Silver and gold have I none, but what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus," he said, "stand up and walk," and he healed him. He didn't have any silver or gold, but he was being generous.

There's this element of generosity, that you may have a lot of money, but you may not have a lot of money. That doesn't mean that you can't be generous. Then over in chapter nine, verse six, "Remember this. Whoever sows sparingly will reap generously." Oh, I'm sorry. "Remember whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." This is often called the law of sowing and reaping. The law of sowing and reaping. Every farmer knows the law of sowing and reaping. The more you sow, the more you reap.

It is a spiritual principle, it's this principle of generosity. "Each man," it says, verse seven, "Should give what he has decided in his heart," we're on the week of the heart, "In his heart to give, not reluctantly, or under compulsion. For God loves a happy giver." Can you buy happiness? God loves a cheerful giver. God is able to make all grace abound to you, so then in all things at all times, you will abound in every good work.

Verse 10. "Now, he, God, 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 may be generous on every occasion, and through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

What does it mean to be generous? It's to meet, the need of anybody you see, whose need you're able to meet. That's what it means to be generous. It's to meet the need of anybody you see whose need you're in a position to meet. If you're not at a position to meet it, then you don't do it. That could be physically, but it could also be, the Lord's telling you, don't do that.

For example, some of you drive up to the beggars on the street corners, the guys with the signs and the \$150 sneakers, and the Lord says to you, give the money. You give them money. To others of you, you come up to the sign and you feel prompted not to give them money. Okay. Either way, doesn't make any difference. That's an evidence of seeing someone who may be in need, who you are either in a position to meet that need, because the Lord prompts you, or you're not in a position to meet, because the Lord doesn't prompt you.

You're walking down the street, you're eating green grapes, and you see the man sitting over there begging, and you keep walking down the street, because the Lord doesn't prompt you to do it. That's okay. The idea of having this generous spirit, I've personally, there may be somebody, but I've never met them, I've never personally known a man who tithes, who is not basically a happy person. I've never known a guy who tithes who's basically not a happy person. On the other hand, I've known lots of men who were financial holdouts on God, who were trying to have the cake and eat it too and blah blah blah, who are miserable, but I've never known a man who tithes who's basically not a happy person.

The Big Idea today, **Have you ever known a generous man who's not fundamentally happy with his lot?** Finally, the faithfulness of God, turn to psalm 37, verse 23. Psalm 37, verse 23. I was answering an email one day to a guy, and he wrote a question about, this is what he wrote. He said, "I have a question about tithing. I have not treated God's money very well over my life. I'm 52, married five years, and have three very young children. Unfortunately, I'm embarrassed to say we have no savings, and about \$38,000 in debt outside of our condo mortgage. \$12,000 credit cards, \$10,000 student loans, \$15,000 from a friend who loaned me the money to buy the condo.

"We've been giving five to 7% of our net income until this year when we upped it to 10% of tithe. If we did not tithe, we could put that money to our credit cards, and pay them off much sooner. Do you think it would be biblically wrong or does God want us to suffer," which is a presupposition by the way, "and pay the price for my immature and irresponsible attitudes towards money?"

It's a fair question. "Our financial situation is a large source of tension in our marriage." Of course it is. "I feel I have let our family down." Of course you do. "My wife asked me to shoot ..." Oh no. To shoot myself, no. "My wife asked me to shoot you a message to see what you think."

Here is my response. Here's how I answered him. I said, A, no one else can tell you what God's will is for anything, unless it is specifically commanded or prohibited by scripture. Have you heard that one before? How many times have I told you that, right? In my opinion, however, I went on, in my opinion, tithing falls into this category that is commanded in both the old testament and confirmed by Jesus in the new testament, Matthew 23 verse 23. My own story is that even though I faced bankruptcy every day for seven years, those of you who know me know my story, tax reform act of '86, next seven years, every day I woke up not knowing if that would be the day that some lender was going to force my into bankruptcy.

Even though I faced bankruptcy every day for seven years, my wife and I tithed every penny we ever heard, still have, actually more, and God has wonderfully provided for us. We have never lacked for anything and I was spared from bankruptcy. My advice would be to keep tithing. I know it is counterintuitive, but God honors those who honor him.

You're going to get through this. May God bless your decision. Psalm 37 verse 23 says this, "The Lord delights in the way of the man whose steps he has made firm. Though he stumble, he will not fall. For the Lord upholds him with this hand, I was young and now I am old." I've been reading this long enough that I used to read it and say oh yeah, I am young. Now I read it and say oh yeah, I am old. "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging for bread. They are always," what? "generous, and lend freely, and their children will be blessed."

Big Idea today, **Have you ever known a generous man who is not fundamentally satisfied, happy, content, at peace with his lot in life?** Let's pray.

Our dearest Father, thank you for the things that you have to teach us about money. We pray that we would all respond more like Zacchaeus than the rich young ruler. Put into our hearts the desire to accept our lot in life, put in our hearts the desire to be faithful and generous with the money that you've entrusted to us. We ask this in your name, Jesus, Amen."