

God's Way for the Good Life

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[0 : 00] G'day everyone. Alright, there's an outline which I'm going to refer to that you received on the way in. In terms of our passage, I'm going to jump around a bit. The Proverbs, some from the Proverbs passage that Jillian read and some from what Brendan read.

How about I pray? Our Father, we thank you that we can gather together as friends and family around your word tonight. Would you open our hearts and minds with your spirit so that we might properly understand and know how to put this into practice.

Amen. Well, I'm going to start with a question as well. Do you want money? You don't have to respond, although you're the only congregation today that didn't.

But that's okay. You don't have to respond. I will respond and I will tell you. Yes, I want money. I'm not quoting a song.

I'm just telling you that I want money. Please give it to me. Why do I want money? Well, surely you know.

[1 : 18] It helps, right? It serves. It serves. It comforts. And sometimes even just by being there as much as by using it. Yeah?

I got pocket money as a kid. Any pocket money getters? No? Oh, yeah. There's one back there. A couple. A couple. I loved pocket money, but it was never enough.

I'd walk the dog to the corner store and spend it on lollies. And then it was gone. I got my first job in year seven doing a paper run. Sounds like a bit of a cliche.

I didn't like working, but I did like the money. That was back then a long time before I was regularly getting paid and using my money every day.

But even then, it had a big impact on my life. And even then, I desired more. I bet you can think of at least one song, if not ten, inspired by money.

[2 : 28] Because, like me, our culture is not just surrounded by money, but completely absorbed by and obsessed with it, isn't it? Well, last week, we started our short series in Proverbs.

And Mark got us started by showing us the birth of wisdom and how God applied wisdom to his creation. Do you remember that? And you remember that we understand wisdom in the context of Proverbs 1, verse 7.

On the slide, it says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Meaning that revering and trusting the Lord sets us on the right path to knowing God's wisdom.

And today and each week, as we look at these topics in Proverbs, God's wisdom will play a special role in helping us properly understand and apply each topic.

And we're going to see that money is a good gift from God. And it is not wrong to want and to have. But there is a right and a wrong way to get it and use it.

[3 : 43] And that is with God's wisdom. Well, you know as well as I do, that more money, to a certain extent, makes life easier.

Right? If we're not overly thoughtful about it, mostly we'd say money makes life better, more comfortable, and let's be honest, more fun.

Right? And why? Because it gives us nice things, doesn't it? It can make us not worry. You know, for example, Oh, I know I'll make the repayments.

Hex fees? What? No worries. The house is leaking. Spare no expense. And let's go on that holiday as well. But there's a right and a wrong way to come by money.

And it isn't just spending our lives running after it. We ought to ask God for money. And there's a right way to do that too.

[4 : 51] We're at point one, if you're wondering. Just think about King Solomon, the author of most of these proverbs. There was a time in his life when he was confronted with a particularly important decision.

God came to him with a question as he began his reign. Let's have a look at it from 1 Kings 3. The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place.

And Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream. And God said, ask for whatever you want me to give you.

Wow. This dream and the question facing Solomon really kind of feels like a dream scenario, doesn't it? Whatever you want, I will give you.

The God of all creation offering whatever he wants. Just imagine. The sky's the limit. A million dollars, Rihanna. Wow. Come on.

[6 : 01] The God of creation. What could he give? He knew. Sorry. Sorry. Solomon knew God though, didn't he?

He knew that even though this was an offer for anything, well, he feared God and he trusted him.

Let me continue from verse 6. Solomon answered, you have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart.

You have continued this great kindness to him and has given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, Lord, my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, but I am only a little child and I do not know how to carry out my duties.

Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great and numerous people, too numerous to count. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and distinguish between right and wrong for who is able to govern this people of yours.

[7 : 17] Understanding the task ahead and God's faithfulness, Solomon prays for the wisdom needed to govern God's people.

I wonder if any in our governments pray like this. What do you think? Hope so. Solomon's request for wisdom was exactly the right thing, wasn't it?

And it goes on to say that because Solomon asked for a discerning heart rather than for personal wealth or power to crush his enemies.

Well, that God would give him just what he asked as well as what he didn't ask for, which was wealth and honor.

It makes sense that proverbs like these came from this wise and discerning heart. The wealth of the wise is their crown, but the folly of fools yields folly.

[8 : 27] Or another one, a faithful person will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished. Solomon didn't pray for wealth, but because of what he did pray, God provided him with it anyway and abundantly.

We need money, don't we? We need it. We need it for almost everything. But let's be honest, it has great power, doesn't it?

I was thinking about it during the week. It's kind of like the one ring from Lord of the Rings. I'm assuming you've seen this despite your age.

The one ring is so captivating. It's so desirable. It whispers the name of the potential bearer, precious.

But it leads to destruction, doesn't it? Paul says in 1 Timothy, Solomon did get rich.

[9 : 52] Solomon did get rich, but not by desiring wealth, but by entrusting himself to the God he knew to be faithful.

He knew and wrote in Proverbs 22, one that Gillian read earlier, that the blessing of the Lord brings wealth without painful toil for it.

Meaning that if you're struggling with money, the answer isn't money. The answer is God. He's the one, the only one who gives us what we have and what we need.

When we seek money by our own means, it becomes our focus, our main focus, doesn't it? And that goal, it can end up controlling everything.

The reason for this is because it becomes entirely up to me to get it and up to me to keep it. And so this search becomes all consuming.

[11 : 01] And so it's me. I've got to get that better position. I've got to get that better return. Or I just have to figure out how to spend less.

And can't we even become so grumpy when someone spends our money instead of us? Except maybe us.

We don't get grumpy, but when we do it. Look, it may not always be like this with you. But money's effect is subtle, isn't it?

And it lingers in the back of our minds and it digs in. But when our desire isn't simply for money, but for the blessing of the Lord, then the Lord will provide it.

And of course, it will be in his way and with his timing. But the difference is, as 10.22 says, the blessing of the Lord brings wealth without painful toil for it.

[12 : 11] This doesn't mean we'll come by money easily. But it means that we won't need to compromise. We won't have to abandon our character in order to get money.

We won't have to bend the rules or overwork ourselves. We'll much more likely be content with what God does or doesn't decide to give us.

Praying for money is not wrong. But there is a right way to do it. So, we've prayed.

But before we think about how to use our money, we need to consider how to have it. Because there is a right or a wise way to have money.

This is point two. And it's funny to think about because unlike praying or using, having is passive, isn't it? This means it's got to do with our attitude.

[13 : 21] You might remember the time when Jesus met a young ruler in Luke 18. The story doesn't start by addressing wealth, but having money is the issue.

The ruler wanted to know how to get into heaven. And so, Jesus replies, keep the law. Well, the ruler had kept the law, it turned out. But something was still missing.

Let's have a look at it from 18 verse 22. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, you still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor.

And then you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. When he heard this, he became very sad because he was very wealthy.

It wasn't a problem that came from doing, but that came from having. Luke doesn't say that he made bad investments or that he was spending his money inappropriately.

[14:27] It said he was very wealthy and so he went away sad. The problem wasn't with his hands, his actions.

It was with his heart. And as a result, he didn't trust God. His money was his help, wasn't it?

His money was his comfort. And he couldn't imagine a good life without his money. And so, he put having money even before having eternal life.

Solomon understood this when he wrote Proverbs 11:4. Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

Or again, 1811. The wealth of the rich is their fortified city. They imagine it a wall too high to scale. Now, you may not be wealthy like the man in the story, but it's far less about the dollar amount and far more about how we think about it.

[15:45] Having enough can often be very different to having what we think is enough. Can you think of the last time that you thought, you know what?

I've got enough now. I don't need any more money. I'm done. If you can, that's great.

What an encouraging goal. Teach me. If not, I reckon you're probably like most of the world. There may be all kinds of reasons that we think we need more or think we don't have enough, but whatever earthly reason we're tempted to give, what's likely is that we're not trusting God with what he's given us.

God cares about what's in your heart, not what's in your bank. If your money is preventing you from following Jesus, perhaps you need to do what Jesus told the ruler, and then you will have treasure in heaven.

Well, if God has given you money, it's important to think hard about what to do with it. Point three. There is clearly lots we can do with our money for ourselves and for others.

[17:17] But how do we use our money wisely in fear of the Lord? Well, we give it away. This is the example set by the woman from Luke 21 that Brendan read earlier.

Let's look at it again. As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts in the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.

Truly, I tell you, he said, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on.

God is the provider of all we have, not just our money, but other comforts as well. And so it's right for us as his creatures who live of his dime, so to speak, that we, as Proverbs 3 says, honour the Lord with our wealth, with the first fruits of our crops.

God gives us all we have. And the woman that Jesus saw knew this all too well, didn't she? She knew that even without her money, God would do what was best for her.

[18:46] So she used her money in fear of God. But let's be realistic for a moment. Giving our money away is hard, isn't it?

It's hard. And even only a fraction of it, let alone all of it. We like our money, don't we?

We can't take that overseas or maybe any holiday without it, and so we want it. And it often feels like the more I give away, the less I'll have to do the things I want or the things I need, like bills.

When will they stop? Tell me. Recently, I purchased a house. And on top of all the payments in the settlement process, there are all kinds of other expenses to properly unpack and settle in.

And I must say, it's really quite stressful as I think about the future and the payments to come and how long it's going to take. Oh! And spending lots of time reflecting on this topic is really challenging my feelings about being generous, about what I have given, what I want to give, and what I'm worried about.

[20 : 19] It's really hard. And you know what? It's really easy to think, well, if Tiff, that's my wife and I, just had a bit more coming in, just a bit, then it wouldn't be such an issue.

Then we'd be able to let it go a bit more easily. That sounds right, doesn't it? Just a bit more? But it isn't true, is it?

The example that Jesus gave wasn't about the generosity of the wealthy who gave out of their wealth, but about the capacity of the poor woman who entrusted herself to God in her poverty.

Do you ever find yourself making this mistake? Maybe particularly if you're a casual or a part-time worker or just a pocket money earner or maybe on the cusp of a promotion or maybe you've just made a really big purchase.

Just a bit more. Just a bit. And then I'll have that security net so that I can give some more away. What about this woman?

[21 : 45] All she had to live on isn't about how much she had to spare. And so the challenge then, isn't it to do the opposite of what feels right?

Don't wait until you have more to give. Give. Give. Don't wait until you have more. When I was a kid, there was a particularly gruesome quit smoking ad campaign.

I don't have a picture for this because it was bloody. And so this smoker in the ad would lift the cigarette to their mouth and as they did, you'd see this up-close view of a hook coming out at the end of the butt and as they put it in their mouth, it would sort of hook on their lip like this.

It was really gross. But its purpose was to illustrate how addictive smoking is. You put it in and it's in there. And smoking is really addictive, isn't it?

It's really addictive. Thank God that we don't need it. Money is even more addictive and we need it.

[23 : 15] God gives it to us. How are you going to use yours?

Well, money is a gift, a good gift from God both to live in his world and enjoy it. And so it's not surprising that we want money. But there is a right and a wrong way to get it, to have it and to use it.

And that is in reverent fear with the wisdom of our God who made us and made it for us.

Why don't I pray that God would help us do this? Our Father, we thank you for everything you do for us and everything you give us.

Thanks for money and for every provision. Help us, Father, to trust you with what you have decided to give us and not give us. Help us to pursue money and to use it with your wisdom trusting that what you do and don't provide is for our good.

[24 : 38] Amen.