

5

THE POOR WIDOW: FAITH THAT GIVES



*What's your favorite story
of a big-hearted gift?*

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Your giving reflects your faith and trust in Christ.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Constructing buildings has always been expensive. Paying for such projects can be a challenge, and Oklahoma in the 1920s was no exception. Oklahoma Baptist University needed a place for their female students, but building a dormitory wasn't going to be easy.

That's when Edna McMillan, a spunky woman married to an oil businessman, stepped up and started a statewide fundraising effort. Edna encouraged women to give and sacrifice. Some women sold eggs, while others contributed as little as one dollar. In fact, not a single individual gift equaled more than one hundred dollars. And with the gifts and sacrifices of hundreds of women, a dormitory was built in 1928 that is still in use today.

Edna McMillan later said, "A rich man is one who has enough for himself and enough left over to help others. Though he be possessed of millions, a man is poor, who has only enough for himself."¹

Giving is a reflection of what is important to us and where our trust lies. One unnamed woman in the Gospel of Luke encourages us to give as an expression of faith.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 12:13-15

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Jesus spoke often about money, but more importantly, He spoke about the motives behind our use of money. The Model Prayer reminds us our daily bread is not from our own hands, but from the generosity of the Father who graciously gives. As believers, we give back as a faithful act of trust rather than withholding out of greed. Having an abundance of things does not equate to having an abundant life.

Thousands of people had gathered to hear Jesus teach. Luke, the only Gospel writer to share this story, described an anonymous member of the crowd who interrupted Jesus, hoping for a judgment regarding inheritance rights. Instead of addressing the legal matter, however, Jesus addressed the man’s heart. “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (v. 15). In other words, what do you want your life to be marked by—your generosity or your wealth? Jesus then turned his attention back to the crowd and reminded them that character is more important than possessions.

Jesus warned against all greed. Greed is an insatiable desire for more and more. Greed can become all consuming and life-focused—a craving that is never satisfied. It’s why Scripture speaks often of greed’s destruction.

How have you seen greed impact relationships?

QUESTION #2

- ▶ “For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD” (Ps. 10:3).
- ▶ “A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him. . . . A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched” (Prov. 28:22,25).

Greed comes in a variety of forms, not just money. One of the most important scientific revelations of the twentieth century was uncovering the double helix structure: the catalyst for our understanding of DNA. While working at King’s College in London with fellow scientist Maurice Wilkins, British researcher Rosalind Franklin produced the first groundbreaking image in 1951. Wilkins showed Franklin’s data to two colleagues, James Watson and Francis Crick, who built on it and never gave her credit. Wilkins, Watson, and Crick received the Nobel Prize in 1962, but because of their greed for recognition, they disregarded Franklin’s contributions as a mere passing thought.²

Luke 12:16-21

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”” ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

How can we avoid the pitfall of becoming dependent on earthly wealth?

QUESTION #3

In an effort to illustrate the eternal perspective of priorities, Jesus used a parable of a rich and greedy man who already possessed more than he needed. A hard-working farmer, he was a self-made man who most likely had overcome agricultural hardships. Any farmer is keenly aware profitable crops aren't always guaranteed, so this successful man had much to boast about. Building bigger barns meant he could store his excess and live without toiling in the fields for years to come. We see his pride and selfishness in the number of times he referred to himself. The rich man had accumulated possessions just for his own satisfaction and enjoyment, yet he would soon learn he couldn't take a U-Haul® to heaven.

Temporary treasures make for riches in this world, but they have no eternal value. Instead of banking on years of retirement, the rich man died and faced the God of creation with no legacy of generosity and no time to change his mind. The phrase, "this night" (v. 20) is a reminder God knows the length of our days. So how can we build riches that count for eternity?

- ▶ **Build relationships that point others to Christ.** Bring a proper balance to your work and relationships. It's often said no one on his deathbed wishes he had spent more time at work.
- ▶ **Make a financial investment in kingdom-building efforts.** Faithfully invest in kingdom causes through your local church. "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).
- ▶ **Serve others in need.** Look for opportunities to bless others financially who have a specific need. Give to others without expecting anything in return or recognition.

What are some practical ways to demonstrate faith and trust through our giving?

QUESTION #4



Luke 21:1-4

¹ Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

In Luke 21 we see a widow who was the polar opposite of the rich man we just saw in Jesus’ parable. She is an excellent example of faith, not because of what she gave, but because of her unselfish character and willingness to give all she had with unhindered trust. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand her attitude was more important than her amount.

We don’t know this woman’s name. We just know she was a poor widow. Widows and orphans were often unprotected and marginalized by society. Most likely the religious leaders who tossed their coins into the temple offering with great commotion, hoping others would notice, shunned her. Jesus did not shun her, but we have no record that He spoke directly to her. It is clear she wasn’t trying to bring attention to herself. In fact, she probably hoped no one observed her meager contribution. But Jesus did see—and He commended her and wanted others to see her generosity too.

She gave all she had. Jesus reminded those in His presence that others gave “abundance,” but her two small coins were significant to God. What she gave was most likely the money that would have bought bread. She gave up her money for food; in doing so, she truly trusted God to provide the food she needed each day. “Give us each day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3). The widow’s quiet example teaches us:

- ▶ Giving to kingdom causes is a consistent act of faith and trust.
- ▶ Giving to kingdom causes is about more than money.
- ▶ Giving to others in their time of need shows health in the body of Christ.

How can our group encourage one another toward a more giving faith?

QUESTION #5

THE RIGHT STUFF

Do a personal inventory of your possessions. Then answer the questions.

In this space, list all of the things of significance that you own.
Think in terms of possessions as well as investments.

Review your list and circle the things that would be most difficult to live without.
Underline the things that you would find easy to get rid of.

Ask God to help you discern how you can invest in the kingdom as this poor widow did.

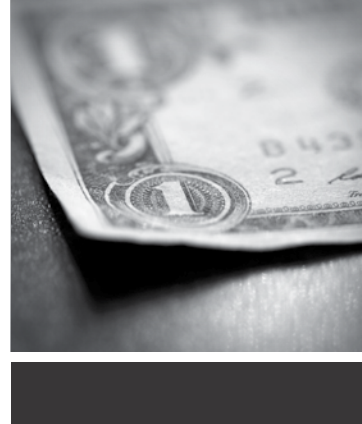
"Those who know that good awaits them
in heaven can afford to be generous
on earth. They lose nothing in the giving
of what has been given to them!"

—JEN WILKIN

LIVE IT OUT

Consider how you can leave a legacy of generosity. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Give.** Ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to bless someone financially in need this week. See if you can be anonymous in your gift.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit to memory Matthew 6:3-4: “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”
- ▶ **Increase.** Evaluate your current charitable giving and how you are supporting your local church. Is your giving consistent? Is it sacrificial? Challenge yourself to give more than you have been for the sake of kingdom work.



We probably won't be asked to give everything we have as this widow was willing to do. But as we evaluate God's gifts to us, we might be surprised how many opportunities to give we will have.

My thoughts

¹ “Who Was Edna McMillan?” *The Baptist Messenger*, August 27, 2012, www.baptistmessenger.com/who-was-edna-mcmillan.

² “Rosalind Franklin,” DNA from the Beginning, <http://www.dnafb.org/19/bio-3.html>.