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"He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him" (Proverbs 28:22).

Power Over Possessions

Lesson Subject: Material things should not control one's life.

L38. Date: August 1984. **Text:** Proverbs 3:27, 28; 6:1, 2; 11:4, 28; 15:27; 23:4, 5; 28:21, 22. **Topic:** Money: Possession of; Covetousness; Giving.

Jesus warned, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Possessions possess or they are possessed. A person controls his wealth or his wealth controls him. Perhaps you know someone who is owned by what he owns. He lives for one more tool, toy, trinket, or trip. He delights in making another dollar. He never gets enough. The person who is possessed by his possessions lives in turmoil of spirit.

Contentment does not come until one masters his material wealth. Blessed is the person who has learned the grace of contentment.

One secret to the greatness of the apostle Paul was his victory over "things." He wrote, "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:11-13).

A study of "Power Over Possessions" should be pursued with these principles in mind: "*Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from*

the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness" (I Timothy 6:6-12).

I. GETTING YOUR POSSESSIONS

God is concerned with how you make your money. It must be earned by honest labor. It must be received with a right spirit. It must be accepted as from the Lord. How you make your money is as important as how you handle it after you get it.

A. Watch out for a spirit of greed in your getting. God warns, *"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house"* (Proverbs 15:27). Money gained in the wrong spirit brings a burden instead of a blessing. Greed is indicated when a person wants to receive and keep for himself alone, not to serve God with material possessions by providing for human need. A mark of the man of God (a quality required in pastors and deacons) is that he is *"not greedy of filthy lucre"* (I Timothy 3:3, 8). The Amplified New Testament suggests that to be *"greedy of filthy lucre"* means "greedy for base gain — craving wealth and resorting to ignoble and dishonest methods of getting it."

A spirit of greed is *"an iniquity to be punished by the judge"*; such a person denies *"the God that is above"* (Job 31:28). A greedy spirit also keeps one from enjoying the benefits of wealth. *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

B. Watch out for temptation in your getting. *"He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye,"* God warns in Proverbs 28:22. He begins to look on each person or thing from a monetary viewpoint. "How much can I make out of this person?" "How much will this thing cost me?" "How can I use this person or thing for my advantage?" All such reasonings are sin.

There will be the further temptation to trust in your wealth for security. The Bible warns about the person who *"made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches"* (Psalm 52:7). He is like the rich farmer who rejoiced in a great harvest from his farms and thought he had laid up enough to provide for him over many years, but who discovered he was living the last day of his life (Luke 12: 15-21). Jesus said any person who lays up wealth on earth and is not rich toward God is a fool!

C. Deal honestly with all people in your getting. God warns against people who will transgress *"for a piece of bread"* (Proverbs 28:21). He does

not refer to one who will steal because he is hungry, but to one who deals dishonestly just to make a greater profit. That is a continual problem to one who has made gain his goal.

The prophets of God called for honest dealing in business matters. They spoke of correct scales in weighing out merchandise. They spoke of mercy in taking a mortgage against the property of the poor. They spoke of reasonable rates of interest when money was loaned to another person. They spoke of a merciful attitude when a brother could not repay a loan on time. They spoke of an equitable salary, a day's pay for a day's labor, for hired help. They warned that a sin against one's fellow was a sin against God.

D. Do not make wealth your aim in life. The Old Testament reads, "*Labour not to be rich*" (Proverbs 23:4). The New Testament warns, "*The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (I Timothy 6:10). Treasures laid up on earth are temporary and uncertain; treasures laid up in heaven are sure and permanent (Matthew 6:19, 20). Take care where your treasures are stored.

II. KEEPING YOUR POSSESSIONS

A. Hold your material wealth as a trust, a stewardship from God. That principle is based on three foundational truths. (1) All things belong to God. "*The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein*" (Psalm 24:1). God said, "*The land is mine*" (Leviticus 25:23). "*Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills*" (Psalm 50:10). "*The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts*" (Haggai 2:8). "*All souls are mine*" (Ezekiel 18:4). All things belong to God, including you!

(2) God gives some of His wealth to us. "*Thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth*" (Deuteronomy 8: 18). Since God "*giveth us richly all things to enjoy*" (I Timothy 6:17), we praise Him "*who daily loadeth us with benefits*" (Psalm 68:19).

(3) We give back to Him a part of what He gives to us. That is how we can obey the injunction of Proverbs 3:9, "*Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.* The portion we return is determined by Leviticus 27:30, "*All the tithe. . . is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD.*" Our giving is not like paying dues. We give and say to Him, "*All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee* (I

Chronicles 29:14).

B. Follow these guidelines in the use of your possessions. (1) Hold your wealth (whether it is little or much) in trust to be shared with those who are in need (Proverbs 3:27, 28; 25:21; 28:27; 31:20). (2) Hold your wealth for profitable use; do not squander it for unprofitable things (Luke 12:19; James 4:3). (3) Hold your wealth for wise investment; do not risk it unnecessarily (Proverbs 6:1, 2; 11:15; 17:18; 22:26). (4) Hold your wealth for profitable use; do not hoard it as a basis of future security (Proverbs 4,28; 23:5; I Timothy 6:17; Matthew 6:19, 20).

Your wealth can be a blessing or a curse, depending on your attitude toward God and toward it. Make it a blessing to yourself and to others.

III. SHARING YOUR POSSESSIONS

A. Share your possessions with people who have material needs. The care of the poor is a great Bible doctrine (Deuteronomy 15:14; Proverbs 25:21; Isaiah 58:7). God warns that He will not answer the prayer of the person who has no help for the poor (Proverbs 21:13). Give to benevolent causes.

B. Share your possessions with God in support of spiritual ministries. Your church, the ministries outside your local community which your church supports, and many other worthy causes provide opportunities for you to invest your money in eternity-related projects.

Follow these guidelines in your giving. (1) Give to honor God (Proverbs 3:9, 10), not to promote your personal interests. (2) Give from a willing heart (Exodus 25:2; I Chronicles 29:9), not because you feel someone must pay the bills" or because as a member you should "pay your dues." (3) Give gladly (II Corinthians 9:7), knowing that is the kind of spirit God desires in your giving and that He takes note of the spirit in which you give. (4) Give according to your ability (Ezra 2:69; Acts 11:29; II Corinthians 8:12). God would work no hardship on you under a legalistic system of giving. Your gifts to God are to be acts of worship arising from a grateful and an overflowing spirit.

A surprising principle is that we give in order to receive. The person who learns to "*honour the LORD with (his) substance, and with the firstfruits of all (his) increase*" will find that his barns will "*be filled with plenty*" (Proverbs 3:9, 10). God will be no one's debtor. He promises, "*Them that honour me I will honour*" (I Samuel 2:30). He promises further, "*The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also*

himself" (Proverbs 11:25). Jesus said, "With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). You should not give just in order to receive. You should give knowing that you will receive and will not suffer lack because of what you have given.

C. Share your possessions according to the divine rules for giving.

(1) Give according to income. "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee" (Deuteronomy 16: 17). The best guideline is to give a set percent of your increase. (Ten percent of your net income is a Bible principle.)

(2) Give without display. To "sound a trumpet" in giving is to be a hypocrite. "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3).

(3) Give with a free spirit. "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). God loves "a cheerful giver," one who gives with a delight at the opportunity of giving (II Corinthians 9:7).

(4) Give regularly, weekly. Christians meet each Sunday to worship God. That is an appropriate time for them to present their offerings to Him as acts of worship. "Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul wrote in reference to a special benevolent offering, not to the giving of tithes and free-will offerings; but the principle applies to all our gifts to God.

(5) Give without hidden motives. To give "with simplicity" (Romans 12:8) means to give "without folds," to have no hidden motives, to give with an open hand and an open heart in worship to God.

The Bible speaks often concerning money: how we get it, how we save it, how we spend it, and how we give it. So much discussion is given the subject because it can be such a blessing or such a curse, depending on how it is used. Be careful that in all matters of finance you "honour the LORD with thy substance" (Proverbs 3:9). Exercise power over your possessions to the good of your soul, to the good of other people, and to the glory of God.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Luke 12:15 relate to this study?
2. How does Philippians 4:11-13 relate to this study?
3. How does I Timothy 6:6-12 relate to this study?
4. How can you guard against greed?
5. How can you guard against trusting in money for security?
6. What three principles express what stewardship means?

7. What guidelines should you follow in the use of your money?
8. What are proper ministries for you to give money to support?
9. What is the promise God makes you in Proverbs 3:9, 10?
10. How can you honor the Lord with your substance?