

Living Large

1. Warm up: When was the first time you used money to buy something for yourself? How did that feel? When was the first time you used money to bless someone else? How did that feel?
2. Read the excerpts from *Rich Christians In An Age Of Hunger*, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Are you accustomed to thinking of yourself as being in the richest 20% of people in the world? Do you believe it? Why or why not?
 - b. What kinds of internal shifts occur when we begin to see ourselves as wealthy? How does this change our perspective?
3. Jesus said . . .

Matthew 19:24. “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Luke 6:24. “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.”

Matthew 6:24. “No one can serve two masters; for you will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches.”

What’s Jesus trying to say here? And how do these verses make you feel?
4. Clearly, our faith should affect how we related to money, but figuring out the details is complicated. In II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, the Apostle Paul challenged the Corinthian Christians to donate to a collection for Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering from extreme persecution and poverty. In the course of that conversation, Paul lays out five principles that can help us build a healthy spiritual relationship with money. Read the excerpts from Second Corinthians 8-9, as printed on p. 3.
5. **Principle #1 – Jesus set the standard for generosity. He held nothing back, and neither should we.** Paul puts it this way: “You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” II Corinthians 8:9. Jesus gave everything. He gave up the glory of heaven. He took on a puny human body. He grew up in a peasant family. He left his occupation as a carpenter to become a traveling preacher dependent on donations. And ultimately, he gave his life on the cross for us.
 - a. Jeff shared a parable about an ant and grasshopper. The ant worked hard all summer to store away food for the winter, while the grasshopper played. When winter came, the grasshopper began to starve and asked for help. But there was only enough food for one. So the ant gave his food to the grasshopper. The

grasshopper lived and the ant died. In essence, that's what Jesus did for us. When you hear this parable, what are your thoughts and feelings?

- b. Jeff suggested that the point is not that we should empty everything out of our bank accounts and give it all away. The point is that we should view everything we have as coming from God and say, "God I hold all my money in trust from you and for you. I'll do whatever you tell me to with it." Do you believe that's the right way to view our money, *i.e.*, it all belongs to God? Why or why not?
6. **Principle #2 – None of God's children should have too much or too little.** Paul says, "I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need. . . . As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'" II Corinthians 8:13.
- a. Do you agree with Paul's premise that no one should have too much? How much is too much?
 - b. St. Basil said, "The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor." Your thoughts?
7. **Principle #3 – Don't let what you can't give keep you from giving what you can.** Paul says, "If the eagerness [to share] is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have." II Corinthians 8:12. In other words, God doesn't measure our generosity against millionaires, but against what we actually do have. God can take what little we have and use it mightily. What's something "small" someone once shared with you that nevertheless meant the world to you?
8. **Principle #4 – Practice "stretch giving."** When telling the Corinthians about the Macedonians, Paul says, "They voluntarily gave according to their means, *and even beyond their means*, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints [in Jerusalem]." II Corinthians 8:3. In other words, the Macedonian Christians stretched themselves just a bit beyond their comfort zone as a way of growing their generosity. Rather than using some fixed amount to measure generosity (such as giving 10%), Jeff suggested we use stretch giving to grow our generosity.
- a. What are your thoughts? Do you agree or disagree – and why? Should we tithe?
 - b. Think of some non-monetary area of your life where you want to grow your generosity. Describe what it would look like for you to practice "stretch giving" in that area of your life?

9. **Principle #5 – Whatever you give, it will all come back to you – in many different ways.** Paul said, “The one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. . . You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.” What do you think that means? Tell us about someone you’ve known who’s a “giver” in life. In what ways were they enriched by their great generosity?

II Corinthians 8:1-15 and 9:6-11, selected verses

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; ²for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, ⁴begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints. . . . ⁷We want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. . . .

⁹For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. . . . ¹²For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. ¹³I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little. . . .’

⁶ The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work . . . , [and] you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.

From ‘Rich Christians In An Age Of Hunger,’ by Ron Sider

“The United Nations estimates that the richest 20% of the world’s population is at least 150 times richer than the poorest 20%.” [Note: That means us. We who live in the United States, even if living on government assistance, are all in the top 20% of wealth in the world.]

“One of the most astounding things about the most affluent 20% is that we honestly think we barely have enough to survive in modest comfort.”

“Our standard of living, compared with that of over a billion very poor neighbors, is at least as luxurious as was the lifestyle of the medieval aristocracy compared with their serfs.”

“The richest one-fifth [of the world’s population] . . . controls 85% of the world’s income, consume 70% of its energy, 75% of its metals, and 85% of its wood. We also produce 66% of all greenhouse gases.”