

BEING STEWARDS OF GOD'S MONEY

Principles & Practices: Practice Four

I will seek God, not money

GENEROSITY

What promise of reward energizes my investments?

PRACTICE four is an application of PRINCIPLE four. Both are grounded in the declaration that a believer chooses to seek God and not seek money.

I will seek God, not money

HILARIOUS OBEDIENCE

I will live with open hands.

As we renew our minds with the promise of God's eternal rewards for our investments in this life, we are motivated to practice living with open hands, in Hilarious Obedience.

Matthew 6:1-4 (ESV)

¹"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ²"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

The foundational word in this fourth practice is "obedience." Matthew 6 provides us with the first spotlight of understanding as to what our obedience is to be like. When we give to others, how should it be done?

What if you cannot do it completely "in secret?" What would the application of the text's principle be then?

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 (ESV)

¹Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ²On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

The second spotlight of understanding comes from Paul's instructions regarding a special offering taken for the poor in Jerusalem. What was to be "systematic" about the Corinthians' giving? Why?

This text also tells us that our obedience of giving should be "proportional." Someone has said, "Equal sacrifice - Not equal giving." Do you think that captures the idea of proportional? Why or why not?

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (ESV)

¹We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints- ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Gordon MacDonald once said, “Great giving is not determined by amounts, but by Macedonian standards.” In light of the text above, what do you think he meant by that?

Mark 12:41-44 (ESV)

⁴¹And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

The Macedonians and this poor widow both model for us what it is to obey “sacrificially.” When we remember that God is the first and most generous of givers, how should that motivate our obedience of giving?

C.S. Lewis once noted, “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.” What set the widow apart from all the rich people?

Our PRACTICE is defined as HILARIOUS OBEDIENCE. We’ve just seen that our OBEDIENCE should be done humbly (“in secret”), systematically, proportionately, and sacrificially. Now we want to connect this foundational word to one that is not usually thought of as going with it. Namely, we want to connect HILARIOUS to OBEDIENCE.

1 John 3:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

The sad fact is that some folks cannot be hilariously obedient because they “close their hearts” against others. Is this possible, on an ongoing basis, for a true believer in Christ?

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Previously we saw that some had “no pity” (closing their hearts). Now we see that true followers of Jesus can be described with what words or phrases?

A Hilariously Obedient disciple lives RESPONSIVELY. How open is your heart to the needs of others?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (ESV)

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

The great love chapter by the Apostle Paul corrects our thinking when we drift into the error of picturing cold, disciplined giving as God’s desire. What is needed to make obedience to God’s directives (to care for the poor) something that He approves of?

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We’ve looked at this passage before. Note verse 5. The Macedonian standard for giving starts where?

One could say that Hilarious Obedience is RESPONSIVE and FROM THE HEART. How are the “purse-strings” and the “heart-strings” connected in your life?

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

The last insight into being Hilarious in our Obedience is found in this text. What kind of giver does God love? What are the contrasts that Paul gives to such a giver? Which is more true of you?