

**MARCH 22, 2020**

Learning to Live Without Avarice



*Even though we are worshipping apart for the next several weeks, we hope these follow-up lessons will provide opportunity for you to continue in personal study of "The Good and Beautiful Life."*

## FOCUS

Perhaps the greatest challenge of chapter 9 of *The Good and Beautiful Life* is simply that it raises so many questions. It raises questions about kingdom economics. It raises questions about "adequate material provision." It raises questions about consumerism and marketing. It raises questions about simplicity and poverty. These are huge questions with precious few answers.

There are two helpful thoughts to keep in mind as you work through this chapter. First, a majority of "Christians" in the western world have glided over Jesus' words about materialism, greed and avarice. It is very good for us to now engage in the difficult work of looking at these areas and taking them seriously as they apply to our lives. Second, it is important to keep in mind that at the heart of all of this is our trust in God. The point of this chapter is not to inflict guilt but instead to recognize areas where we can continue to grow closer to God. For example, I may not trust God enough to live without a retirement fund, but we know from all of our reading that this doesn't mean God is disappointed with me or that God is going to "smite" me; it simply means there is an area of my life where I don't have a radical trust of God. You are encouraged to be honest in naming the things you can't imagine giving up. Encourage your group to be honest in naming the things they can't imagine giving up. Put those items on the table and allow God to teach and guide you by looking at those things. Then spend time inviting God to lead you into the deeper waters of the simple life.

**LOOKING BACK:** As you consider this chapter, it might be helpful to reference chapter 2 from *The Good and Beautiful God* titled "God is Good." When we sacrifice our resources, we sometimes see the benefit. An example would be when Jim Smith loaned \$300 to a man who didn't pay it back, yet Smith received \$500.00 from a different source when he needed it. However, there are other times when we may not see the benefit of our sacrifices. In these instances, we may receive the "good that only the good know." These paragraphs from "God is Good" illustrate the point:

*Thus, the right things to focus our attention upon are "the good things peculiar to the good." What does that mean? It refers to the blessings that are given only to those who strive to do good. That is the only justice, in a sense, we can count on. For example, at the time I am writing this I am in Brazil working with two pastors. They have both been offering love and serving people and preaching to the people in Rio and Campinas for years. Though I do not yet speak fluent Portuguese, and I cannot understand what people are saying to them, I have watched them throughout the day as dozens of men and women who have been blessed by their ministries came forward to hug them and thank them. Pastors Eduardo's and Ricardo's face radiated with joy. This is something unknown to those who do wrong. Those who are selfish and spiteful and mean will never know the feeling those two pastors know. It is something "peculiar" to those who do good. Conversely, Augustine says that we should also "give the widest birth to the evils peculiar to evil men." To use the analogy above, those who are selfish and spiteful and mean are intimately acquainted with guilt, loneliness, remorse and self-hatred. They know what it is like to feel darkness surround them and overtake them. This does not solve the problem entirely, but it gives us a glimpse into the goodness of God. God promises that those who love, those who serve, those who are honest, and those who are faithful will know—will know a kind of joy and peace that those who are evil will never know (pp. 46-47).*

## OPENING PRAYER

*Generous God, everything belongs to you and is given by you to establish your kingdom on earth. Enliven our conversation throughout this class with your very Spirit, so that we might be set free to live in harmony with your will for all creation. Amen.*

## SOUL-TRAINING QUESTIONS

Use the questions below to discuss your experience of de-accumulation.

1. What challenges did you encounter as you gave away some of your possessions?
2. How did it feel after you gave the items away?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER

**THE BIG IDEA IN THIS CHAPTER:** We are all stewards of money we earn or are given, and we can invest them either in earthly or heavenly treasures.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. At the beginning of the chapter the author shares his story of buying a pair of Adidas Americanas. Recount a possession you desperately wanted and eventually bought. How did you feel once you owned it? What finally happened to the item?
2. We hear Suze Orman's story of watching her father save the cash register from a burning building and how it formed an important narrative for her (p. 156). What is a story from your childhood that explains your view of money.
3. The author recounts a story about a time when he loaned money to an acquaintance, and from that loan he learned an important lesson about kingdom economics (p. 162). If kingdom economics are real, how will you live differently after reading this chapter?

## ENGAGING THE WORD

To cultivate the inner reality of simplicity the author tells us that 1 Timothy 6:6-10 is a great passage to reflect upon. He writes, "Paul advocates contentment with adequate provision. Beyond that we are tempted to serve mammon and not God" (p. 167). Take a moment to read 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (NIV).*

Discuss the following questions:

1. What strikes you about this Scripture passage?
2. What soul-training exercises have helped you develop the inner reality of contentment and simplicity?

3. Make a list of 30 items you possess, then work through these questions from the chapter (p. 166).
  - a. Do I really need this?
  - b. Does this item give me kingdom joy or merely temporary happiness?
  - c. How much of the money I would spend on this item can I invest in heavenly treasures?
  - d. Identify any measurable steps that you could take to develop inner contentment and outer simplicity.

## **GO IN PEACE**

Close your time by reading these valuable words:

*Treasures in heaven relate to the things God is doing. And we know that God is helping people. Thus, the best way to lay up treasures in heaven is to live out Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (KJV, p. 159).*

## **FOR THE COMING WEEK**

Read chapter 10, "Learning to Live Without Worry." The soul-training exercise is a specific form of prayer, which you will want to experience for as many days a possible before our next session.