

The Fruit of Lifelong Stewardship

Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth. (Proverbs 10:4)

Scripture: Proverbs 10:1–5, 15–16

Song: “Only One Life to Offer”

A couple of years ago, I met with my kids and their spouses to talk about money. I had decided to follow the advice of a financial advisor to give my adult kids all the details about where my wife and I had retirement funds and how much we’d saved. It took about an hour to explain every account, share all the contact information, and discuss our plans for the future. When our meeting was finished, my daughter-in-law said, “Thanks for handling your finances so well.”

Her remark surprised me. Saving, giving, avoiding debt, and spending prudently had become habits we’d practiced for the decades of our marriage. I realize now we had simply developed a lifestyle around the principles Scripture encourages. We’d worked hard. We’d managed carefully, and as a result, God was blessing us with the prospect of a secure retirement.

Not everyone in poverty is lazy, of course, but few lazy people stay wealthy for long. Let’s be grateful for opportunities to pursue meaningful work and for the blessings we enjoy as the fruit of our labor.

Father, thank You for the satisfaction that comes by working hard. Help me see how You’re blessing me because of the work I’m doing today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

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 May 11–17. **Mark A. Taylor** retired from a lifetime career in Christian publishing and continues to write from his home north of Cincinnati, Ohio. He tells his story of Alzheimer’s caregiving at www.unchosenjourney.com.

His Love Isn't About Being Fair

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”
(Matthew 20:16)

Scripture: Matthew 20:1–16

Song: “How Can I Say Thanks?”

I remember well the day my aging mother, a lifelong faithful Christian, talked to me about life after death. “Well, I just hope the good Lord sees fit to somehow let me into heaven,” she said. Only much later in my life did I realize her comment reflected the way I’d been raised to define my relationship with God.

I grew up believing I had to follow the rules, check off the boxes, and do the right things in order to please God. I wonder now if my dear mother wasn’t coming to a growing awareness that such a mindset creates a burden too heavy to carry. The fact is that God loves us—period. He loved us before we were born. He’s loved us through all of our errors and selfishness and ignorance. He loves us in spite of our sin. He knew we were going to sin; our sin doesn’t surprise Him. That’s why He sent Jesus.

The landowner in today’s parable had a similar attitude toward all his workers. He thought the same about them all, whether they’d worked hard all day or only for an hour. I’m coming to believe God wants my heart, and that giving it to Him will take care of the actions. But keeping a timesheet of my work for Him will only frustrate me and distract me from reveling in His love.

Father, thank You for loving me today and assuring me You will love me tomorrow, regardless of whatever failure I may suffer. Such love makes me only want to serve You more. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Working to Rise above Poverty

“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.”

(Amos 5:14)

Scripture: Amos 5:6–15

Song: “Lord, We Praise You”

Every week I volunteer in a local church-based ministry to under-resourced families who come for help from several surrounding counties. They leave with grocery carts piled full. Occasionally a first-timer weeps at the difference these gifts will make.

But the ministry offers more than food and clothing. Guests who ask will find a volunteer to pray with them. A wide range of courses, classes, and training is available for people who need help with job interviews or family budgeting or developing self-sufficiency. This ministry believes real justice comes to those who discover a path out of systemic poverty and an understanding of how to thrive in our society.

I’m learning the Bible’s concern for the poor is about more than feeding a family today. God is pleased when we show others a way to rise above the systems and beliefs that have trapped them in poverty. And I’m grateful to work with believers who know spiritual deficiencies create the most devastating poverty of all.

Father, I thank You for the riches of Your grace in my life, both physical and spiritual. Help me to discover how to help others escape every kind of poverty. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Suffering We Endure Won't Last

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. (James 5:7a)

Scripture: James 5:1–11

Song: “Be Still, My Soul”

I remember teaching a Bible class decades ago and saying, “Materialism can be a bigger problem for people struggling with finances than those with plenty of money.” My wife and I were young then, just starting out. She had a part-time job, and its pay raised our income to a level just livable. I often fantasized about winning some large jackpot. I saved every bill in a small drawer to pay just before it was due. I drove from one grocery store to another to find the best bargains. I looked at the homes and vacations others enjoyed and fought envy. Money was constantly on my mind.

We learned to live on our income and even to save. And nowadays, settled into retirement, I'm struck by a thought that comes as I read today's Scripture. While James condemns the rich who exploit the poor, he also encourages the suffering to be patient. And I realize that persistence paid off for my wife and me. We didn't give up on God when finances were tight. And now, when illness and old age give us bigger things to worry about than money, I don't think much about it at all.

It's a good perspective to attain at any stage of life. “Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.” Whatever our struggle, it won't last forever. Meanwhile, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

Father, be merciful to me today as I seek to trust You with today's challenges. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Easier to Understand than to Do

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

Scripture: Colossians 3:12–17

Song: “We Are One in the Bond of Love”

My father, who had walked out of our lives 13 years earlier and left me to keep my mother afloat financially and emotionally, asked me to forgive him. He wanted to reestablish a relationship with me. He was sorry, truly sorry, for all the difficulty his absence had created for my family. He even offered to repay me for my mother's funeral. Until she died, I had given up any notion of ever seeing him again.

That meeting taught me more about forgiveness than any Bible lecture or Scripture reading. It's such a grand doctrine, forgiveness, until you must confront someone who has blatantly and willfully wronged you without excuse. The Bible says we should try to imagine how God looks at us amid all our wrongdoing. Perhaps that can help us “forgive as the Lord forgave you.” I know my dad never hurt me as much as I've hurt our heavenly Father.

If I will take seriously the admonitions in Colossians 3:12, I think obeying verse 13 will be easier. Clothed with “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience,” I'll be a long way toward a mindset that allows me to forgive. This is a list of goals I'd do well to review every day.

Father, forgive me for all the selfish slights You have endured from me. Equip me, Lord, for forgiveness when others hurt me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

My Abundance, Their Needs

When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. (Deuteronomy 24:21)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 24:14–21

Song: “Count Your Blessings”

More than 40 years ago, my first international trip was to visit a mission work newly established in India. I had never seen people living so simply. Their houses with thatched roofs sat on dirt floors. Many seemed to have only one garment, tattered and dirty. Most of the adults did hard physical work all day for only subsistence wages. Many of the children never went to school. My life seemed so luxurious, so comfortable, so—wealthy!—compared with theirs. How could I be at ease with so much when so many suffered with so little?

I remembered that experience as I thought about today’s text. This passage reminds us that poverty is not a twenty-first century phenomenon. Those living in ancient Israel knew about poverty. And in this Scripture, we see God’s heart for the under-resourced. He told His people to take what they needed from their work and to leave the extra for those who could not work.

I realize how blessed I am with so many extras. God doesn’t demand that I give everything away. But I do believe He wants me to be concerned about those with less to share. Sharing with the poor from my abundance pleases Him.

Father, give me grace to see how my many extras can help others who have so much less than I. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Learning to Give, Rekindling Hope

But godliness with contentment is great gain. (1 Timothy 6:6)

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:6–8, 17–19

Song: “Blessed Be Your Name”

The request came at Christmastime, just when so many worthy causes are asking for money. I had already given to many of these organizations, and I didn't feel I could afford any more. But this was different. It came from an agency offering help to Christian workers struggling financially. And “struggle” hardly defined the need of the family they wrote about. This young couple, after years on the mission field, had returned to the U.S. to take care of an extended family member facing disease and eventually death. Now the husband and breadwinner had died too, after a long bout with his own illness. His widow and young children were facing huge medical bills, living in a house with a just-discovered, major, necessary repair.

I followed the links in the email and sent a small gift. I realized I had no expense that would force me to go without “food and clothing,” the Scriptural standard for contentment. By comparison with the dire need of this Christian family, I had no choice but to consider myself “rich in this present world.” I wasn't sure my gift would qualify as “generous,” but it was extra and unbudgeted, and I needed to be “willing to share” (v. 17).

In our materialistic society, it is difficult not to “put . . . our hope in wealth.” I'm coming to see how giving helps us keep our “hope in God.”

Father, I am so grateful for all You have given. Help me, as I learn to give some of it to others, to rediscover my hope in You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.