

# It's about provision



It's about provision – and the freedom that comes from focusing on God's amazing abundance, even as the world bombards us with messages of scarcity.

God has given us all that we have, including the freedom to decide how we will respond to this generosity. Will we operate from a stance of scarcity or abundance? Will we hoard or share? Will the resources entrusted to us burden us or empower us?



**Everence**

## Living rich

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

– *II Corinthians 9:6-7*

### Read

II Corinthians 9:6-10

### Reflect

“If I were a rich man ... ” This song from the popular musical *Fiddler on the Roof* comes to mind whenever I read Paul’s words here in I Corinthians. “If only I were rich, I could give away lots and be so generous and that would bring great joy” is the way it goes in my head. But wait. Paul tells us that we all have the opportunity to be generous.

What about people who are truly needy? What do they think when they read this text? Are they looking at us – the people with money – and wondering whether believers in Christ are really generous people? Are they wondering what God meant when he instructed us to give to the needy in reckless abandon?

The biblical principle is simple: sow little, reap little; sow a lot, reap a lot. So why shouldn’t we give to the needy in reckless abandon?

Today’s passage reminds us of how absolutely amazing it is to give and to be full of joy and generosity while doing so, even if the amount we can give is limited. Go for it and see what God will do through your reckless abandon.

In the end, it is not about how much we give, because we can never out-give God. In the end it is about our attitudes and our actions. Give cheerfully to someone and celebrate God’s awesome provision for us all.

### Pray

Heavenly Father, let me know what it means to be a generous person, not only with my money and possessions but also with my praise and encouragement to those around me no matter where I am. I will make the effort to give generously. Multiply my gift and richly bless those in need. Thank you for being so generous with us and showing us the way to generosity. Amen.

### Act

This week put some money – \$20 or \$50 – in your pocket to use as a spontaneous expression of God’s goodness by giving it away as you are directed by the Holy Spirit.

– *Brian Bell*

## More precious than gold

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

– *1 Peter 1:18-19*

### Read

1 Peter 1:3-21

### Reflect

“Buy gold. It is your surest bet against the future,” the commercial message urged. The announcer went on to list the uncertainty of virtually every other commodity in which one might invest. I was almost convinced, but just in time I remembered the true source of my future confidence. As a follower of Christ, I have an inheritance waiting for me in heaven that “can never perish, spoil or fade.”

God has already provided the goal of our faith – the salvation of our souls. What a wonderful assurance! Yet, like the early Christians to whom Peter was writing, we put our hope in gold and silver (and real estate and retirement funds, and other perishable things). Financial planning, while not entirely a bad practice, too easily gets in the way of what it's really all about – our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Gold and silver (and all the other things we hold so dear) will one day perish. Only our salvation has eternal value. Through the precious blood of Christ, the lamb without blemish or defect, God has provided us with a gift of far greater and more enduring value than anything the world has to offer.

Are we spending most of our energies on things that will one day fade? Peter encourages us to fix our hope on God and his amazing gift of salvation.

### Pray

Precious Father, keep my heart fixed on the living hope you have provided through your Son, Jesus Christ. I praise you for the wonderful inheritance you have given me. Forgive me for making the pursuit of silver and gold my life's priority. Amen.

### Act

On the notes pages, list three ways you will “spend” from your heavenly inheritance this week toward the goal of bringing praise, honor, and glory to Jesus Christ.

– *Rebekah Burch Basinger*

## God's ownership of creation

I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with great joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

– *1 Chronicles 29:17*

### Read

1 Chronicles 29:1-20

### Reflect

Their big old farmhouse was gradually being restored, and the family loved their home. Then they heard about homeless children in Bangladesh. It didn't seem right that they should have so much and others so little. The children discovered that a house in Bangladesh could be built for \$350. The family prayed about this need. They pooled their Christmas and birthday money and came up with \$60. What else could be done?

When the local Christian radio station offered two concert tickets as a prize for answering a Bible question, the 10-year-old daughter phoned in and won. She donated the tickets back to the station to be auctioned to raise money to build a Bangladeshi home. The highest bid came in at \$1,000! Now there was enough for three homes. But the family didn't stop. They baked and sold pies to raise more money for even more houses. Then a local church joined in the fundraising effort with a contribution of \$2,600 to the cause. One family's generosity inspired an entire community to joyful giving.

### Pray

Dear God, your Son taught that it is more blessed to give than receive, and this is a hard truth for me to accept. I confess wanting to hold on to the things I have – as though it is all about me. Give me the grace to willingly and joyfully give to you. Amen.

### Act

Stop, look, and listen for an opportunity to join in an extreme stewardship adventure by seeking out a giving opportunity that will stretch you beyond your weekly commitment to your local church ministry.

– *Gord Gooderman*

## No need to worry

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

– *Luke 12:31*

### Read

Luke 12:22-34

### Reflect

Here in Luke 12, Jesus paints a beautiful word picture of God's care for his world. From the birds of the air, to the lilies of the field, to us, his precious children, God watches over all his creation. There's no need to worry. The riches of God's Kingdom are ours for the taking, and we are set free to give generously.

This worry-free life begins with small, daily steps toward spiritual maturity. Putting our treasure in the right place is a crucial part of that process. As Fred Smith, the founder of Fed-Ex, observed, "We need to give in order to develop spirituality. Many of us are dwarfed in our spiritual lives by our refusal to give, because our money is where our ego is located. Giving is the drain-plug for our greed."

The Gospel hymn tells us that as we turn our eyes toward Jesus, the things of earth fade away in the light of his wonderful face. In that moment, our eyes are opened to the amazing riches we have received from Jesus' hand – salvation, joy, peace, a servant's heart, evangelistic passion and a host of other blessings. There's no need to worry.

### Pray

Thank you, Father, for adding the things I need while I seek your kingdom. Teach me how to pull the plug on my greed and be a generous giver. Amen.

### Act

In the notes pages, list the ways you are growing in spiritual stewardship of the resources God has given you and your family. Discuss your list with a friend or your spouse.

– *Leonard Chester*

## Channels of blessing

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

– *Malachi 3:10*

### Read

Malachi 3:8-12

### Reflect

There's nothing like watching youngsters protect their possessions to remind us of how we must look to God. A child sitting at a restaurant with her grandparents might resist the idea of sharing her fries with grandpa. She doesn't yet understand that if he wanted, grandpa could easily buy another order of fries. So she holds onto what she has, afraid there might not be enough if she shares even one fry.

A similar fear prevents many adults from obeying the clear principles of God's Word with regard to tithes and offerings. We worry that if we give 10 percent (or more) to God, there might not be enough for us. The widow at Zarephath no doubt had the same fear when Elijah asked her to make a small cake for him first, even though she had only a handful of flour left (1 Kings 17: 7-16). Yet her obedience resulted in a great miracle of God's provision.

The prophet Malachi reminds us that as we are faithful in tithing, God opens the floodgates of heaven and pours out more blessing than we can possibly handle. This doesn't mean we should invest in “bigger barns.” Rather, as the blessings rain down on us, we are to become channels of God's grace to others, secure in the knowledge that God's goodness and provision are more than enough for today, tomorrow and all eternity.

### Pray

Forgive me for investing my treasure in earthly things instead of bringing it into your storehouse. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and remind me, Heavenly Father, that you will and do provide for your children in ways beyond anything I can imagine or hope for. Amen.

### Act

Make a commitment to set aside at least 10 percent of your paycheck, or any other source of income. Give it cheerfully to your local church and wait as God pours blessing into your life.

– *Harold Albrecht*

## It's about provision

"One of the greatest missing teachings in the American church today is the reminder to men and women that nothing we have belongs to us."

– Gordon MacDonald, pastor and teacher

### Coming together

15 minutes

1. How was your week? Talk about the high points and the low points.
2. What did you take from the message this past Sunday morning?
3. What have you learned through the first three weeks of this study?
4. Have you ever had a need but no idea how that need was going to be met? How did you handle it?
5. If you have ever had a need miraculously met, share that story.

### Learning together

40 minutes

#### *Read Scripture and discuss*

After this, the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children: so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)

"Belief is one of the most important ideas in all of the Bible. It is all-important because we must believe in order to be saved. For this reason, Abraham's belief in God stands as a testimony to us of the value, significance, and hope found in believing God and his promises." – Unknown

1. In verse 1, God greets Abram by saying, "... don't be afraid. I will protect you and reward you greatly." What would this have meant to Abram, a man who wanted children but had none?
2. What do we learn about Abram from his response (verse 2) to God?"
3. How do you suppose Abram feels about leaving his inheritance to Eliezer of Damascus?
4. After God promises Abram descendants, what is remarkable to you about Abram's response and reaction?

5. At several points in the New Testament, the authors discuss Abram’s faith in God and his promises. Read the following texts: Romans 4:16-25, Galatians 3:6-14, and Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12.
  - What do the New Testament authors think is most significant about the story of Abraham and Sarah?
  - What happened as a result of Abraham’s faith?
  - The authors don’t refer to Abraham’s conversation with God. Does that make any significant difference?
  - What is the difference between faith and belief?
6. Once Isaac was born, how would Abraham have reflected on God’s promise of providing descendants and the long wait leading up to his son’s birth?
7. What do you think God’s point is in Genesis 22 when he asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?

“Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord was pleased with him.” (Genesis 15:6)

**Sharing together** 10 minutes

For you, what is the hardest part of trusting God and his promises of provision? Is it harder to trust God’s promises because they seem outlandish and impossible or because often God’s promises involve a period of waiting and trusting? Why?

**Praying together** 10 minutes

Take a few moments and in light of the study just completed give everyone a chance to share “what’s happening” in their spiritual lives and what God has been saying to them. Then answer the question: How can we help you this week in prayer?

As you then pray together, if someone is uncomfortable praying out loud give them the opportunity to say a one sentence prayer or to simply pray in silence. Also, don’t forget to pray for any specific items mentioned and any other needs you are aware of within the group.

Name	Praise or concern



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