

Kingdom First, Me Later

“²⁸And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

-Mathew 6:28-34

The previous verse is quite profound, in my opinion. People worry so much about their bills, food, clothes, and other even less important things and, yet, Jesus challenges us to seek first his kingdom and all of these things will be given us! He will provide all we need. Oftentimes, in our culture, we neglect this verse and have very little to do with God in such things. It may be due to a simple lack of faith, but I believe, more often than not, it is an issue of selfishness. We worry about our needs, have little for faith for God to help us meet them, and neglect God and his people in order to address the issue.

People's financial life is the area where I have seen this most often. Here is an example of someone living pay check to paycheck. They are paid less than they expected to be paid. Because they are paid commission or hourly wages for hours that change week to week, they no longer have the money to pay all of their bills, so they neglect tithing to pay them. This is a tough issue to discuss. Having faith in God to provide can require obedience that feels scary. However, Jesus' challenge is to seek **first** his kingdom. That will take a real step of faith in many situations, especially in the area of finance. But, seeking first his kingdom with our finances means fulfilling our obligations as mentioned in the Bible as well as acting upon God's urging in our own hearts every single day.

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Tithing is one of the most well known and most important financial commands in the Bible. Seeking God's kingdom first means giving your tithe first and always. Other financial obligations that we as Christians have are paying back all that you owe, sharing with orphans and widows, helping the poor, and providing for your family. Men, especially, as heads of their households, have a great responsibility to the Lord when it comes to handling the household finances. It can be very difficult, but when following God's commands, even in regards to finances, it is very important to obey immediately and completely.

Jesus' challenge is to seek first his kingdom!

God speaks in many ways, but I want to focus on two, more specific, yet still pretty general ways, in which I have seen the Lord speak to people regarding their finances. The first is through His Word. Someone will have been reading a particular Scripture regarding stewardship. Then they receive extra money in the husband's paycheck. Upon reading the verse, however, they feel a strong yearning to share that abundance with a family that has been struggling financially instead of buying that new TV.

Another way I have seen the Lord speak is through prayer. While this may seem very obvious, so many people underestimate the power of prayer. Many times, people will pray fervently about their needs and ask the Lord to meet them, but they do not ask the Lord what He wants them to do with the provision God has already blessed them with. It is easier to ask the Lord what to do with excess money you have laying around, but it is very difficult to ask the Lord what to do with your money when you barely have enough to pay the bills. But, as stewards of all we have, including finances, it is important to **always** ask the Lord what to do with **his** money, even in times of need. Just like the woman with the two small copper coins (Mark 12:41-44) we must **always** give to the Lord what is his.

It seems that when people recover from financial hardship, they feel great compassion for the poor. They look for opportunities to give and pray for God's wisdom in handling excess money. But after awhile, people forget what it is to struggle and become more and more selfish. When we have abundance, we must guard our hearts because there is always that voice that tells us we need more. More, of course, is never enough. Advertizing is built on the premise that we should NOT be content in our present circumstances, but rather lavish ourselves with all the material blessings that we "richly deserve."

God's remedy for greed is thankfulness. As you count your blessings each day and thank God for His provision of food, shelter and extras, contentment begins to settle in your hearts. Contentment allows us to be good stewards of all that is entrusted to us, whether it is great wealth or just enough to get by.

God's remedy for greed is thankfulness!

Handling your money wisely can be difficult sometimes, especially in a world of where debt is expected and being responsible is not. But, God holds his people to a higher standard. He calls us to be perfect (Colossians 1:28). This includes handling our finances (just remember that God "...opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" [James 4:6]). However, despite these difficulties, God gives something to hold on to, to look forward to: his promise to take care of all of our needs and more if only we seek first his kingdom as stated in Mathew 6:28-34. So, never give up. God loves you and he is watching out for you. Seek first his kingdom in your finances. Follow the biblical commands and act upon his moving in your heart.