

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

April 24, 2022

Keep The Change

"Our Investor"

Deuteronomy 8:11-18

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Did you know even God gets junk mail? *Reuters Limited* reported some years ago one of the gold-sticker-laden sweepstakes entry forms and magazine sales pitches that used to show up just about weekly in most Americans' mailboxes was actually sent to God. True story! It really happened. How do we know? Evidently, American Family Publishers sent its computer-generated entry form to "God of Bushnell," at the Bushnell Assembly of God, a church in central Florida. The form read, "God, we're searching for you. You've been positively identified as our \$11 million mystery millionaire." The fine print showed the Creator was merely a finalist, but the letter encouraged him to try his luck. The letter continued on to say, "Imagine the looks you'd get from your neighbors ... but don't just sit there, God, come forward now and claim your prize." With God being one of the finalists, the other 20 million finalists might as well give up. Bill Brack, the church's pastor, told the *Tampa Tribune* that he had not yet decided whether the church would enter the sweepstakes. The pastor said, "God already has \$11 million." I don't think God needs the money, but it is a nice gesture to include God. As we begin this sermon series entitled, *Keep the Change*, our hope is we will together learn a few truths from God that can help us handle our finances in a way pleasing to God and that sets us free from all the traps and challenges of wealth. We begin today where we need to - the realization that God, as our investor, is the One who enables us to prosper with the wealth we all have.

Deuteronomy 8:11-18

¹¹ "But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. ¹² For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, ¹³ and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! ¹⁴ Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. ¹⁵ Do not forget that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry. He gave you water from the rock! ¹⁶ He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors. He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. ¹⁷ He did all this so you would never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.' ¹⁸ Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath.

SUBTLE DANGERS OF WEALTH

Here in the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites have become a very prosperous, mighty nation of wandering nomads and they are now camped out by the Jordan River getting ready to enter the Promised Land, the rich land God promised He would give them many generations prior. As they are preparing to enter, Moses gives the Israelites some final words to prepare them to successfully enter the land and to appropriately handle the wealth that would soon be theirs. Here in *Deuteronomy 8*, Moses tells the Israelites that when they get into the Promised Land and experience its abundant wealth and their stomachs are full and satisfied, they have built luxurious homes, have prospered in possessions and are wealthy, that they are to heed this warning. They are not to become proud, thinking that they achieved all this on their own, thus pushing God out of the picture. They were not to become intoxicated with wealth and prosperity. For some who gain wealth, it can easily lead to becoming prideful of our accomplishments and in time we can drift farther away from God as we have all that we want and no longer need God to help us.

For his first sermon in a beginning preaching class, Lawrence, an African student, chose a text describing the joys we'll share when Christ returns and ushers us to our heavenly home. Lawrence began his sermon saying, "I've been in the United States for several months now. I've seen the great wealth that is here—the fine homes and cars and clothes. I've listened to many sermons in churches here, too. But I've yet to hear one sermon about heaven. Because everyone has so much in this country, no one preaches about heaven. People here don't seem to need it. In my country most people have very little, so we preach on heaven all the time. We know how much we need it."

Our prosperity can become so intoxicating we eventually don't really need God because we have more than we need. We may not admit that, but we live our lives as if that were true. We then live for the things of this world which pushes God out of our lives. It is interesting that Jesus even said in *Matthew 19:23-24*, *"²³I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ²⁴I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"* Jesus is not at all saying it is wrong to be wealthy, to work hard earning a living, or to even enjoy your wealth, but it becomes a destructive problem in our lives when it becomes such a high priority it pushes God away. It is very easy in our prosperous American culture for us Christians to grow complacent, lukewarm in our faith. We have so much that we don't need to rely on God, and we then grow complacent in our relationship with God. We might all say that would never happen to us because we know we need God. But how many of us have drifted away from God because we are so busy working hard to prosper and spending so much time enjoying our prosperity that God has become at best a lower priority in our lives, only important when God is convenient. Then the things that draw us closer to God are no longer high priorities in our lives such as: coming regularly to worship, spending time each day with God in prayer and studying God's Word, and so much more. Moses, then warns the Israelites not to allow this to happen when they prosper in their new home in the Promised Land. Again, there is nothing wrong with prospering, having wealth. It is also good and right to

have a healthy self-pride in our accomplishments, but the challenge comes when our successes, our possessions, our wealth slowly take a higher priority in our lives, and we then drift away from God and our faith becomes weak or nonexistent because we really do not need God in the details of our lives.

REMEMBER GOD OUR INVESTOR

Moses then challenges the Israelites to not forget, to remember all God has done to bring about the great wealth they have and will have even more of in the Promised Land. Moses is telling the Israelites they would not be where they are without God who took care of them every single step of the journey. Throughout their wandering in the wilderness, God led His people, the Israelites, on a very challenging journey. Along the way of the journey, the people were learning to follow God's every lead, to obey God's will, and to wholeheartedly rely upon and trust God to take care of them. Every step of the way God took care of them. Think about all God did to bring the Israelites from slavery to the Promised Land. God first rescued the Israelites from generations of slavery in Egypt. God then saved them from being overrun by Pharaoh and his army by opening up the sea and allowing the Israelites to miraculously pass through unharmed as God defeated Pharaoh and his army. God also guided their every step by telling them to follow a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. God provided water and food for them in the wilderness and God defeated all the enemies they faced on their journey. God took care of all their needs throughout the journey all the way to the Promised Land which He promised to provide for them.

The Psalmist was reminded of who God is and the fact that the entire world, all the resources of this world belong to God. The Psalmist tells us in *Psalms 24:1* just how rich God is as he says, "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;*".... God is the creator of the ends of the universe and as such all that we have belongs to God and is given to us by God. The late Bishop Edwin Hughes once delivered a rousing sermon on "God's Ownership" that put a rich parishioner's nose out-of-joint. The wealthy man took the bishop off for lunch, and then walked him through his elaborate gardens, woodlands, and farm. The rich man said to the bishop, "Now are you going to tell me that all this land does not belong to me?" Bishop Hughes smiled and suggested, "Ask me that same question a hundred years from now." The bishop put things in perspective. All our wealth is temporary, ultimately owned by God and given to us by God. This is a great perspective for all of us to think about all that we have now and then reflect on where our wealth will be in 100 years and to whom will it belong?

Moses wanted the Israelites to remember it was God who gave them all kinds of resources with which to prosper. God gave the Israelites the strength to acquire wealth. Also, every blessing the nation of Israel enjoyed was the result of God keeping His covenant promises beginning all the way back to Abraham. It is important for us to remember our wealth and prosperity we enjoy today can never be regarded as a natural right. All we have is a gift from God. The majority of people in this world lack the kind of wealth we have in our country, many of them not even knowing if they will have anything to eat today, and really have no hope or ability or chance to create wealth just

because of where they live. We who are wealthy do not need to be prideful of what we have as if we have achieved all this without God. Out of God's grace we have been given the ability to engage in economic production and development that many in the world cannot do on their own. We need to remember that that is a gift from God. When we attribute our success entirely to our abilities and effort, we are in effect forgetting God gave us the very breath in our lungs and the necessary intellect and abilities to prosper. We are not self-made, we are God-made. It is extremely important to not only understand and recognize that, but we need to continually remind ourselves of that truth every day.

Therefore, to make sure wealth and prosperity do not slowly erode our relationship with God and pride then takes over our lives, it is important for us to simply stop and take time to look back over our lives and remember all God has done for us. We need to continually remind ourselves of this truth by daily taking a break from our hard work and all the fun we are having enjoying our prosperity and take time to acknowledge God has made all of this possible, to reflect upon all God has done for us, and how God has provided all of this for us out of His great wealth. We are to do this regularly in God's presence and as we do so we can't help but praise and worship God and give God thanks for all He has done and provided for us. Isn't that what we do when we take a moment to pray before every meal? Aren't we taking the time to stop and give God all the credit for even the food we eat and to thank Him for every bite? If we make a habit of stopping throughout each day in the midst of our wealth and prosperity and simply just turn to God and put our attention and focus on Him, it will make all the difference in how we handle our wealth and our relationship with God. Retired US Navy Four-Star Admiral, William McRaven, spoke to the students at the University of Texas about what he learned as a Navy SEAL that needed to be done to change the world: "I have been a Navy SEAL for 36 years. But it all began when I left the University of Texas for Basic SEAL training in California. Basic SEAL training is six months of long torturous runs in the soft sand, midnight swims in the cold water off San Diego, obstacles courses, unending calisthenics, days without sleep and always being cold, wet and miserable. It is six months of being constantly harassed by professionally trained warriors who seek to find the weak of mind and body and eliminate them from ever becoming a Navy SEAL. Every morning in basic SEAL training, my instructors ... would show up in my barracks room and the first thing they would inspect was your bed. If you did it right, the corners would be square, the covers pulled tight, the pillow centered just under the headboard and the extra blanket folded neatly at the foot of the rack — that's Navy talk for bed. It was a simple task — mundane at best. But every morning we were required to make our bed to perfection. It seemed a little ridiculous at the time, particularly in light of the fact we were aspiring to be real warriors, tough battle-hardened SEALs, but the wisdom of this simple act has been proven to me many times over. If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride, and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. And if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made—that you made—

and a made bed gives you encouragement tomorrow will be better. So, if you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.”

For us as Christians, it is the everyday, simple times we spend with God in His presence that make the difference in how we handle our wealth and the place it has in our lives. It is in God’s presence where we are reminded God is the provider of all our needs and our ability to achieve and acquire wealth, that it all belongs to God, and we then give God thanks and praise and ask God to help us to be responsible in how we manage our wealth. The more we turn to God and recognize all we have belongs to God, and then praise, worship, and give God thanks each and every day for all He has enabled us to earn, it puts everything in its proper place. Then we can enjoy our wealth and use our wealth in ways God directs us to do so. So, our close intimate relationship with God is the key to keeping our wealth in its proper place in our lives. Truly, our greatest wealth is our relationship with God. All the things of this world cannot begin to compare to that relationship. As Jesus said in *Matthew 6:33*, “*Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.*”

So, I ask us all today, not how are we doing with our wealth, but how is our relationship with God? When is the last time we stopped in the middle of our busy lives of working and playing to spend quality time with God, humbly recognizing He is our provider and then praising, worshiping, and thanking God for all He has done for us?

Icebreaker I – Have you ever entered one of those mail-in sweepstakes? Have you ever won or known someone who has won?

Icebreaker II – Do you make your bed every morning?

1. What must the Israelites guard against? How does this translate to us today?
2. What relationship choices are set before the Israelites as they enter the promised land?
3. What kind of relationship does God want with His followers and why?
4. When, if ever, have you experienced “God’s wilderness” in your life? In what respect was it like a “desert”? In what sense was it disciplinary? What role did God play in this? In what ways is life different because of that?
5. How are producing wealth and accumulating wealth different? What does this chapter teach you about your capacity to produce wealth?
6. Is it harder for you to maintain a proper relationship with God in prosperity or in hardship? Why?
7. How is it with your soul?
8. What are your struggles and successes?
9. How might the Holy Spirit and Scriptures be speaking in your life?
10. How can this group pray for you this week?