

Thank you for joining us in this 8-week journey of prayer, fasting, and Scripture meditation! It is my hope that God will use this time to speak to you in fresh ways, challenge old assumptions, awaken you to new practices, and shape your life differently for the sake of his Kingdom!

The idea for this 8-week focus was born in a recent Administrative Council meeting. We had been wrestling with our church family's financial situation for several months, and made plans to do so more deeply over



the summer. With this in mind, it was suggested that perhaps God is trying to get our attention with our current situation. Perhaps now would be a good time to open ourselves up to something the Spirit has to teach us. Perhaps more needs to change than our financial situation. Perhaps we are in need of other changes, both personal and corporate, if we are willing to listen for the voice of Jesus speaking to each of us. The suggestion was raised

that this might be a time for focused prayer and fasting. So, what you now hold in your hands is the result of that prompting and discussion.

Within the pages, you will find weekly Scripture passages to guide your prayer and contemplation. While they all focus on Jesus' teachings on money, I think you will find that they often speak to many more issues, as they should. Our financial situations do not exist in vacuums. They are integrated into the rest of our lives. By examining our attitudes toward money and possessions, we will be opening ourselves up to being examined in many more areas, under the compassionate conviction of the Spirit.

Each week will have a rhythm as follows: read the selected passage of Scripture twice (on Tuesday and Thursday) while using the meditation questions to guide your thoughts (space is provided if you'd like to write out your responses), and pray the Prayer for the Week each day within your prayer life. Additionally, each Tuesday and Thursday will also be a day of fasting. On Tuesdays, we will fast from food in some form. On Thursdays, we will fast from entertainment or convenience in some form. When fasting from food, choose an option that fits your experience with fasting. If you're just starting out, fast from a particular type of food that you typically consume daily. Or, if you're more experienced, you can fast an entire meal, or even fast from all food for the entire day! When fasting from entertainment/convenience, choose to go without something that is part of your typical daily routine: watching TV, checking social media, listening to the radio, playing leisure games, or a device that makes life convenient/efficient.

As you fast, pray and study, make note of what God is teaching you. Write down your insights, convictions and encouragement on these pages, or in a separate journal. I trust that at the end of these eight weeks, we will all be changed by the light of Christ! God bless your journey!

Matthew 19:16-24 | The Rich and the Kingdom of God

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁰ "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

This Week's Prayer: "Father, I am seeking the eternal life that is found in you. I want to live according to your commands and decrees, but more importantly, I want nothing to hinder my obedience to your calling. If my wealth is great enough to keep me from walking in the ways of your Kingdom, help me see how to best let it go or give it away in order to follow you completely. Amen."

Tuesday Meditation:

1. The rich man wanted to understand what kinds of "good things" would place him in closer proximity to the eternal life God provides. Is there anything wrong with doing good and obedient things? When does the desire to do good things become unhealthy?
2. With the second part of his response, Jesus suggests the man "enter life" by abiding by the commandments, specifically some of the famous Ten Commandments. Do you think about commandments as things that can bring life? Why or why not?

3. Though the rich man had been living in obedience to the commandments, he admitted that there was still something lacking. He could feel that there was something missing. Have you ever felt like obedience was an empty experience, or at least short of fulfilling? Why?

Thursday Meditation:

1. Responding to the rich man's desire to fill the emptiness in his heart, Jesus gives a two-fold answer: divest yourself of your wealth (giving it to the poor), and follow Christ. Why do you think Jesus demanded those things be done in that order? Why could the man not become a follower, a disciple, without giving away his wealth first?
2. After proudly proclaiming his obedience earlier, to the commandments, the rich man's tone now changes. He is "sad" and walks away from Jesus. We can safely assume he won't heed Jesus' advice. His wealth is too great. What can we learn about his sad withdrawal from Christ?
3. This rich man's sad withdrawal from Jesus comes right on the heels of the joyful pursuit of Jesus by some children in Matthew's gospel (Matt. 19:13-15). This contrast is huge. In Jesus' time, people assumed the rich were the most "inside" the Kingdom (evidence by the divine blessing of wealth), and children were among the least valued members of society, usually being pushed to the margins as unimportant. But, here we find Jesus welcoming children and connecting them to the characteristics of the Kingdom, and essentially driving the wealthy away with his teaching. Is your life shaped more by child-like trust or by wealth-building worry?
4. When faced with the opportunity to have an empty place in his heart filled by emptying his pockets, the rich man chooses full pockets over a fulfilled heart. Have you ever done the same?
5. This call from Jesus, to divest and follow, is based on the idea of moving from commandment obedience to "perfect." The word "perfect" might be better interpreted as "complete" or "whole." Is money, or some other idol, holding you back from being completely loyal to Jesus?

Matthew 6:1-4 | Giving to the Needy

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

This Week’s Prayer: “Father, I want to serve and honor you by practicing righteousness. I want to live in ways that display the character of Christ. I desire to give to others, and serve them, as part of a rhythm of righteous living in response to the grace I have received. But, I don’t want to do so in order to be congratulated, praised and rewarded by other people. I want my motives for giving and service to be pure. Help me to find “secret” ways to give and serve, especially those in deep need, so that my only reward comes from you. Amen.”

Tuesday Meditation:

1. Would you categorize yourself as a “people pleaser” to some degree? Do you sometimes do things so that people will like you, accept you, or be happy with you?
2. Do you think it is wrong to desire a “reward from your Father in heaven?” What kind of heavenly “reward” do you think there might be for those who give and serve “in secret?”
3. Besides financial giving, what other ways of practicing righteousness might be susceptible to the motivation of being seen and praised by others?

Thursday Meditation:

1. The desire to be “rewarded” for generous giving was tied to the surrounding Greek and Roman culture of Jesus’ time. Back then, people generally donated to public projects or poor neighbors in order to gain esteem, loyalty and popularity. The Jewish concept of giving to the temple, in order to support the facilitation of worship and care for the poor, was to be much different. But, worldly attitudes toward giving had seeped into the faith community. Do you think that still happens in our world today? If so, in what ways?

2. The idea of giving found here in Matthew 6 is closely connected to two other practices: prayer and fasting. Taken together, these three disciplines were at the core of Jewish piety for generations. Why do you think they are so closely linked? Do you find any of the three to be easier/harder to engage than others?

3. In what ways can you “secretly” serve and bless your family, church, or neighborhood with your money, talent or time?

Luke 12:13-21 | The Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

²⁰“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

This Week’s Prayer: “Father, help me be on my guard against greed. In a world where advertising and promotion are everywhere, I know that I will struggle with contentment. Help me to be content in You. I desire to wisely discern the difference between meeting my needs and hoarding an abundance. If there are needs around me that can be met by sharing out of my abundance, which I know is a gift of grace, show me where and how to do so. Instead of focusing on myself, help me to see You and others more clearly. Amen.”

Tuesday Meditation:

1. Jesus is approached with a concern that would have been very common for a rabbi to handle: a dispute about inheritance rights. Why do you think Jesus, a popular rabbi, would refuse to get involved in a matter like this?
2. If we are to be “on guard against greed,” what does that look like in practical life? What kinds of attitudes, actions, choices, places, people and influences might be most likely to bring us head-to-head with greed?

3. What does an “abundance of possessions” look like? How do you know when “enough is enough?”
4. Is there a certain possession, or type of possession, without which you feel like you’d have a hard time surviving or thriving? If so, why?

Thursday Meditation:

1. The problem in the parable is *not* the “abundant harvest” itself. The problems are in how the rich farmer (only a rich farmer would have multiple barns in that time) responded to the great harvest. His response gives evidence about his attitude and his identity. As someone who was already wealthy, his attitude was to hoard the entire harvest. And, worse still, his identity was tied to his possessions. He lost sight of the fact that when his life was “demanded from” him, it would be severed from all his gathered wealth. Does either of these themes of attitude or identity resonate with you? How much of your identity is tied to your possessions? If you suddenly received 5x your annual salary one year, what would you do with it?
2. Is there a difference between wisely planning for the future and hoarding a great abundance? If so, how can we distinguish between the two?
3. Compared to the society in Jesus’ day, our ability to “store our stuff” has grown exponentially. What does that say about our culture today? How should we respond to that influence?
4. It is no coincidence that this parable about an abundance of possessions is followed quickly by a warning against worry (Luke. 12:22-24). Do you believe there is a connection between wealth and worry? Why or why not?

Matthew 17:24-27 | The Temple Tax

²⁴After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

²⁵“Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”

²⁶“From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. ²⁷“But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

This Week’s Prayer: “Father, I am thankful that you are the God who provides all things. I may not be sustained by catching coin-concealing fish, but I believe that you have guided the decisions and circumstances that have led me to find provision for life. Your hand is always at work. Just as the Jewish people in Jesus’ day gave from their provision to support the work you were doing through the temple, I want to support the work you’re doing today through your Church. Help me to trust your provision and allow me to celebrate your presence with your people. Amen.”

Tuesday Meditation:

1. The “temple tax” being discussed in this passage was a very specific offering that was expected of all Jewish men based on interpretation of the Torah. It was a very rare exception allowed by the ruling Roman authorities, who disallowed the collecting of any taxes by “client states” that would not be deposited into Roman coffers. This tax was given to support the ongoing ministry of the temple as sacrifices were made, incense was burned, prayers were offered, and the Torah was read. Do you see any connection between this offering and the “tithes and offerings” within Christianity today? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Jesus came up with such a unique way of providing the payment for the tax? It clearly demonstrates his miraculous power and knowledge! But, is there a special connection between a coin-bearing fish being caught by a former fisherman at the command of Jesus? Are you open to ways that God might miraculously, or uniquely, provide for you?

Thursday Meditation:

1. Before sending Peter out on a fishing excursion, Jesus asks Peter an interesting question about taxation: do the kings of the earth tax their own children? The answer is easy: no. With this brief conversation, Jesus is sending a powerful message. As the Son of God, he has every right to exclude himself from a tax related to his father's "house." He even seems to include Peter in this right of exemption. This is most likely because Jesus knows that the temple's days are numbered and his followers represent a new way of being God's people on earth. With the arrival of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is breaking free from the tentacles of geography and ethnicity that had been growing around it. Do you live in the kind of freedom and exemption from empty tradition that Jesus speaks of? Why or why not?
2. When Peter opens the mouth of the fish on his hook, he will find "a four-drachma coin." This is just enough to pay the tax for two people. Do you ever get frustrated that God sometimes only provides "just enough?" The wandering Israelites certainly did (see Exodus 16:11-20), and suffered the consequences of discontentment! What kinds of reasons do you think God has for providing "just enough?"
3. Though he was rightfully exempt, Jesus paid the temple tax so that he would not "cause offense." He willingly set aside his right and freedom for the sake of others and for peace. Is there something in your life that you have every right to have/do/say that God might be calling you to lay down or give up for the sake of others or for peace?

Luke 21:1-4 | The Widow's Offering

As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ²He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

This Week's Prayer: "Father, bend my heart toward generosity. Whether I have much, or I have little, help me to hold onto what I have loosely. I don't want to give out of my excess or my leftovers, but out of everything I have, and to do so with joy and freedom. Help me stop worrying about what others give, or what I give in comparison to others. I want to give as a response to your leading alone. With my money, my time, my talent, my energy, and my passion, show me how to live and give sacrificially and faithfully. Amen."

Tuesday Meditation:

1. Do you believe Jesus still "looks" at what we give, whether our money or time or something else, in order to judge the condition of our hearts? Why or why not?
2. In Jesus' time, a widow would likely have almost no income and be sustained by the generosity of her extended family. How does that change your understanding of this story?
3. The "two small copper coins" the widow gave was an extremely small amount of money—not even enough to pay for a quarter of an hour of hired labor. Have you ever felt like you aren't able to give God "enough" because your means are too modest? What does this story teach you about that idea?

Thursday Meditation:

1. Another way to translate the beginning of verse 4 is to say the rich gave "out of their leftovers." A similar theme plays out in the story of Cain and Abel (see Genesis 4:2-5). Cain offers "some fruit," while Abel offers "fat from the firstborn of his flock." In that story, and in Luke 21, it's clear how God feels about that kind of offering. Are you tempted to give only out of your "leftovers?" What would it look like to give more like Abel or the widow?

2. A common interpretation of the story of the widow's offering is the phrase "not equal giving, but equal sacrifice." Are you tempted to compare your giving to others? Why or why not?

3. Even though modern Bibles separate the two with a chapter break, this observation of a widow's offering comes immediately after Jesus' critique of the scribes who "devour widows' houses." The most likely interpretation of this idiom is that scribes, who were often assigned as "guardians" of property for widows, were known to take advantage of the power of those arrangements and siphon proceeds from the property into their own pockets. So, Jesus' critique of the rich is two-fold: they give out of their leftovers, and their wealth may possibly be gained by exploiting the marginalized and voiceless members of society. Consider the ways you make (or spend) your money. Are you supporting the exploitation of the vulnerable in any way?

Matthew 22:15-22 | Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

This Week’s Prayer: “Jesus, I am thankful that you lived a life of “integrity and truth” and I desire the same for my life as I follow you. I understand that I don’t have complete control of where my money goes. Just as in your day, taxes are demanded from me. Thank-you for the reminder that all coins, bills and bank accounts are temporal, and tied to this world. Though the powerful forces in this world will fight over the wealth bearing their image, help me to avoid that trap. I want to obediently give what is required by the ruling authorities of my day, but more importantly, I want to give all of myself to you. Amen.”

Tuesday Meditation:

1. The Pharisees and Herodians used a financial question in an attempt to “trap” Jesus in a no-win situation. Have you ever felt “trapped” by a financial situation in which there seems like no easy solution? Why do you think money has such a capacity to “trap” us?
2. The question of paying the imperial tax is not just a financial one—it is also a question of loyalty rooted in religious devotion. At this time, the Jewish people (under Roman rule) hated paying taxes to Rome, especially using Roman coins imprinted with an “image” of the emperor and declaring his divine nature with an inscription. The distaste for this arrangement was so strong

that there was a very bloody (and unsuccessful) Jewish rebellion when Jesus was a small child. If Jesus denounces the tax, the Herodians (loyal to the Romans) can have him arrested as a rebel. If he supports the tax, he may lose favor among many Jewish followers who would believe he was submitting to the “idolatry” of recognizing Caesar as a legitimate king. Take some time to look at a few coins in your pocket/purse. What kinds of things do those coins declare? Does our money invite us to make idols today?

Thursday Meditation:

1. Jesus proposes paying the imperial tax in this story. It is important to remember that those taxes were collected to pay for many things the Jewish people would have objected to—including the cultic worship of Caesar! And, the early Christians who read Matthew’s gospel would have been paying taxes to support the governing authorities who were executing some of them! Do you get frustrated about some of the things your taxes end up supporting? What does this story teach you about that kind of situation?
2. The real “key” to this passage is not about money or taxes—it is about what belongs to whom. The Pharisees and Herodians were so blinded by the debate over who rightly “owned” the money that they missed the bigger picture. The coin was imprinted with Caesar’s image, and therefore belonged to him. But, according to the very beginning of God’s bigger story, every human being has been imprinted with His image! (see Genesis 1:26) How does it make you feel to know that God proudly proclaims ownership of your life? How are you projecting that image of God in your life to the world around you?

Matthew 21:12-13 | Jesus at the Temple

¹²Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³“It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

This Week’s Prayer: “Father, shape me into a person of deep and consistent prayer. I know that there is no longer any temple called your house. I know that our church building is simply a meeting place and not your home. I believe that you choose to dwell within your people. As you inhabit my life, let me be a faithful place of persistent prayer. And, as a result of being a place of proper prayer, let my life never be seen or known as a ‘den of robbers’ in which your provision obscures communion with you, or is mistreated or used to take advantage of others. Continue to cleanse me and make me whole. Amen.”

Tuesday Meditation:

1. This “cleansing” of the temple is a prophetic act and not a practical one. Jesus isn’t attempting true temple reform, but declaring judgment on what it had become. Do you regularly allow Jesus, through Scripture and the Spirit, to speak prophetically into your life, revealing areas that need to be cleansed? Why or why not?
2. One of the many facets of this prophetic act is a judgment upon the temple’s treatment of the poor. It was the rural poor who would most likely need to change money (for a “small fee,” of course) and purchase a sacrificial animal. That Jesus targets “those selling doves” is revealing—this would have been the most “affordable” acceptable sacrifice. Forgetting all the Old Testament commands to extend special care to the vulnerable (widow, orphan and alien), those in power within the temple complex have allowed a system to develop that takes advantage of them. Within the financial structures you have influence over, how are the vulnerable being treated/mistreated?
3. Though he is overturning tables and benches, Jesus is not acting with rage or violence. In John’s account, we find that Jesus took the time to braid a whip before using it to drive the animals out (see John 2:15). This is a patient, reasoned, but passionate exposure of what has gone wrong. Where are the places in our world today where financial priorities have clouded our judgment? How can we wisely, but passionately, work to expose them?

Thursday Meditation:

1. Another facet of this prophetic act is the fact that the money-changing tables, along with the stalls and cages holding the animals, would take up a lot of space. As a result, this activity almost certainly was located in the outermost “court of the Gentiles” within the temple area. So, in order to make arrangements for worship (likely with some profit in mind, and likely taking advantage of the poorest worshippers), the people were overcrowding the only place where non-Jews were allowed to worship God. In this atmosphere, Jesus prophetically refers to the temple as a “house of prayer,” citing Isaiah 56:7, which contains the phrase “for all nations” immediately afterward. The focus on finances was crowding out the mission of the temple and the people of God: to bless all nations with the knowledge and experience of God. How might your focus on finances be crowding out the mission that God has for your life?

2. The biggest problem with this entire scene is its location. To engage in appropriate temple worship, foreign coins had to be traded for ones that didn’t bear human image. Escorting animals on a long pilgrimage to Jerusalem was at least impractical, if not impossible. These are all legitimate practical concerns. But, they are encroaching on a space recognized as sacred. Jesus knew that practical, necessary parts of life—even an obedient life—were occupying the wrong space and receiving the wrong emphasis. Are there any things in your life, even practical or necessary things, that are drawing attention away from your ability to worship wholeheartedly? Do any financially-motivated things draw you away from regular corporate worship?

Matthew 6:19-24 | Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

This Week's Prayer: “Father, I want to store up the right kinds of treasure in the right kinds of places. I know that even the best protected wealth in this world is vulnerable to destructive or diminishing outside forces. But, treasure in heaven can never be destroyed or diminished. Make my heart hungry for treasure that will last. Train me to live generously so that my life might be full of health and life. I want to serve only one Master, one King, and one Lord. Amen.”

Tuesday Meditation:

1. If your “heart” is where your “treasure” is, then where is your heart? What kinds of things do you “treasure” in your life? What do you try to protect most carefully?
2. What kinds of things do you think contribute to “heavenly treasure?” How are you cultivating space for those to grow?
3. Later in this chapter, we read that there is a proper order of things. We are to seek the “kingdom and righteousness” (v. 33) of God first, and trust that our needs will be met. How are you seeking the good of the kingdom of God? Is it hard for you to trust and not worry?

Thursday Meditation:

1. The words of Jesus in the middle of this passage seem like they do not fit—a discussion about the benefits of healthy eyes. But, in Jesus’ culture, this was an idiom that referred to generosity. Someone with a healthy eye was said to have a “single focus” on generous living. A bad or diseased eye represented a person whose life was not impacted by the light of generosity. How would you rate your “eyesight?” Would those who know you best describe you as generous or stingy?

2. Jesus clearly labels money as a powerful force by giving it the title of a potential “master.” Do you think of money that way? Are you aware of the potential it has to control you? In Jesus’ time, it was very rare for a servant to have two masters, mostly because each master would know that the person’s loyalty would be divided. Does your view of money tempt you to have conflicting loyalty? Looking beyond money, how about your time, focus, energy and concern? How much goes toward Kingdom-oriented things, and how much goes toward self-satisfaction?