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## ***The Disciple-Making Minister***

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

### **Chapter Thirty-Two Stewardship**

In an earlier chapter about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we considered some words Jesus spoke to His disciples regarding stewardship. He told them not to lay up treasures on the earth, but in heaven. He pointed out, not only the foolishness of those who invest in temporal treasures, but also the darkness that is in their hearts (see Matt. 6:19-24).

Money is the true god of those who lay up earthly treasures, because they serve it and it rules their lives. Jesus declared that it is impossible to serve God and money, clearly indicating that if God is our true Master, then He is also Master of our money. *Money, more than anything else, competes with God for the hearts of people.* That is no doubt why Jesus taught that we cannot be His disciples unless we give up all our own possessions (see Luke 14:33). Christ's disciples own nothing. They are simply stewards of that which is God's, and God likes to do things with *His* money that reflect *His* character and furthers *His* kingdom.

Jesus had much to say about stewardship, but it seems His words are often ignored by those who profess to be His followers. Much more popular is the twisting of Scripture to fabricate the modern "prosperity doctrine" in its many forms, subtle and blatant. The disciple-making minister, however, desires to teach people to obey all of Christ's commandments. He will thus teach, by his example and by his words, *biblical* stewardship.

Let us consider what Scripture teaches about stewardship, and at the same time, expose some of the more common examples of false teaching about prosperity. This will by no means be an exhaustive study. I've written an entire book on this subject that is available to read in English at our website (ShepherdServe.org). It is found under the heading of "Biblical Topics" and the subheading, "Jesus on Money."

### **The Supplier of Needs**

Beginning on a positive note, we remember that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, "God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). That familiar promise is often quoted and claimed by Christians, but what was its context? As we read contextually, we soon discover the reason Paul was so confident that God would supply all the needs of the Philippian believers:

Nevertheless, you have done well to *share with me in my affliction*. And you yourselves also know, Philipppians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I

departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica *you sent a gift more than once for my needs*. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, *having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent*, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:14-19, emphasis added).

Paul was certain that Jesus would indeed supply the needs of the Philippians because they had met Jesus' condition: They were seeking first the kingdom of God, proven by their sacrificial gifts to Paul so he could continue planting churches. Remember that in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you (Matt. 6:32-33).

So we see that Paul's promise in Philippians 4:19 doesn't apply to every Christian who quotes and claims it. Rather, it only has application to those who are seeking first God's kingdom.

### **What Do We Really Need?**

There is something else we can learn from Jesus' promise in Matthew 6:32-33. We sometimes have difficulty distinguishing our needs from our wants. Jesus, however, defined what our needs are. He said, "Your heavenly Father knows that you *need* all these things."

What are those "things" Jesus was referring to that would be added to those who sought first His kingdom and righteousness? They are food, drink and clothing. No one can debate that, because that is what Jesus said just prior to the promise under consideration (see Matt. 6:25-31). Food, drink and clothing, are our only real material needs. Those are, in fact, the only things that Jesus and His traveling band of disciples possessed.

Paul also evidently agreed with Jesus' definition of our needs, as he wrote to Timothy:

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. *And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content*. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang (1 Tim. 6:6-10, emphasis added).

Paul believed that food and covering were all that we really needed materially, otherwise he would not have said we should be content with just those things. That leads us to a little different perspective regarding his promise to the Philippians that God would supply all their needs! The way some preachers expound on that verse, you would think it said, "My God shall supply all your greeds!" Moreover, if we should be content with just food and covering, how much more should we be content with what we do actually have, which for most of us is much more than just food and covering?

## **Discontentment**

Our problem is that we think we need so much more than we really do. Consider the fact that when God created Adam and Eve, they owned nothing, and yet they were living in a paradise. Obviously, God did not intend for us to derive our happiness from collecting material things. Have you ever considered that Jesus never once turned on a faucet or stood under a shower in a bathroom? He never washed His clothing in a washing machine; He never opened the door of a refrigerator. He never drove a car or even a bicycle for that matter. Not once did He listen to a radio, speak to someone over a phone, cook a meal on a stove, or preach through a public address system. He never watched a video or a television show, turned on an electric lamp, or cooled off in front of an air conditioner or electric fan. He never owned a wristwatch. He didn't have a closet full of clothing. How could He have been happy?

In the United States (and perhaps in your country as well), we are bombarded with advertisements that show us how happy people are as they enjoy their new material things. Consequently, we are brainwashed (or "brain-dirtied") into thinking that happiness comes from acquiring more, and regardless of how much we accumulate, we're never content. This is what Jesus referred to as "the deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22). Material things promise happiness but rarely deliver on their promise. And as we join the world's frenzied race to acquire more material things, we actually become idolaters, slaves to mammon, who forget God and His most important commandments to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves. God warned about this very thing to Israel:

Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deut. 8:11-14).

Similarly, Jesus warned that "the deceitfulness of riches" could potentially choke spiritual life from a true believer who allows himself to become distracted (see Matt. 13:7, 22). Paul warned that "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil," saying that "some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang" (1 Tim. 6:10). We are admonished by the author of the book of Hebrews, "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5). These are just a sampling of Scripture's warnings regarding the dangers of wealth.

## **When Money is Master**

Perhaps there is no better barometer of our relationship with God than our interaction with money. Money—the time and the means we use to acquire it, and what we do with it after we acquire it—reveals much about our spiritual lives. Money, when we possess it and even when we possess none, fuels temptation perhaps like nothing else. Money can easily stand in utter contempt of the two greatest commandments, as it can become a god above the only God, and it can entice us to love ourselves more and our neighbors less. On the other hand, money can be used as a means to prove our love for God and our neighbors.

Jesus once told a parable about a man who allowed money to rule him rather than God:

The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said,

“This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared? “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).

Jesus portrayed this wealthy man as being very foolish. Although blessed with health, productive land and farming skills, he didn't know God, otherwise he would not have stored up his excess and retired to a life of selfish pleasure and ease. Rather, he would have sought the Lord regarding what he should do with his blessing, knowing that he was but God's steward. God, of course, would have wanted him to share his abundance and continue working so he could continue to share his abundance. Perhaps the only other acceptable alternative would have been to stop farming and devote himself to some self-supporting ministry, if that is what God called him to do.

The wealthy farmer in Jesus' parable made a major miscalculation regarding the date of his death. He assumed he had many years remaining, when he was just hours away from eternity. Jesus' point is unmistakable: We should live each day as if it was our last, always ready to stand before God to give an account.

### **Two Perspectives**

How different is God's perspective from man's! The wealthy man in Jesus' parable would have been the envy of most everyone who knew him, yet God pitied him. He was rich in the eyes of men, but poor in the sight of God. He could have laid up treasure in heaven where it would have been his forever, but he chose to lay it up on earth where it was of no profit to him the moment he died. And in light of what Jesus taught about greedy people, it seems quite unlikely that Jesus wanted us to think the wealthy man went to heaven when he died.

This parable should help us all to remember that everything we have is a gift from God, and He expects us to be faithful stewards. It has application, not only to those who have material wealth, but to anyone and everyone who is tempted to make material things too important. This Jesus made clear as He continued speaking to His disciples:

For this reason [that means what He was about to say was based on what He just said] I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:22-34).

How Jesus' words stand in contrast to those of modern "prosperity preachers"! Today we are being told that God wants us to have more, whereas Jesus told His disciples to sell what they already possessed and give it to charity! Again He exposed the foolishness of those who lay up their treasures on earth—where those treasures are destined to perish, and where the hearts of the treasure-owners reside.

Notice that Jesus applied the lesson of the rich fool to those who had so little that they were tempted to be concerned about food and clothing. Being worried about such things betrays that our focus is wrong. If we trust our caring Father as we should, we won't worry, and that carefree attitude liberates us to focus on building God's kingdom.

### **Christ's Example**

Jesus had many other things to say about money. He taught, however, as every disciple-making minister should, by His example. He preached what He practiced. How did Jesus live?

Jesus did not amass earthly riches, even though He could have easily exploited His situation and become extremely wealthy. Many gifted ministers have wrongly assumed that if their ministries attract money that God must want them to be personally wealthy. Jesus, however, did not use His anointing for personal gain. Money that was given to Him was used to make disciples. He even provided the needs of His traveling band whom He discipled.<sup>1</sup> In our day, young disciples most often have to pay their own way to be lectured by older ministers in Bible schools. Yet Jesus modeled the exact opposite!

Jesus also lived a life of trust, believing that His Father would supply all His needs and bless Him so He could supply the needs of others. Sometimes He was invited to banquets to dine, and other times we find Him eating raw standing grain from a field (see Luke 6:1).

On at least two occasions He provided food for thousands of people who came to hear Him. How different this is from modern Christian conferences where everyone who wants to hear the speaker must pay an entrance fee! We who provide free food for those who attend our ministers' conferences are sometimes even mocked for "paying people to listen to us." In reality, we're just following Jesus' model.

Jesus also cared for the poor, as His group kept a moneybox from which distributions were made. Giving to the poor was such a regular feature of Jesus' ministry that when He told Judas to work quickly as he departed from the Last Supper, all the other disciples assumed that Judas was either going to buy food for their group or taking money to the poor (see John 13:27-30).

Jesus truly loved His neighbor as Himself, and so He lived simply and shared. He didn't need to repent at the preaching of John the Baptist who said, "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none" (Luke 3:11). Jesus only had one tunic. Yet some prosperity preachers try to convince us that Jesus was wealthy because He wore a seamless inner garment (see John 19:23), something supposedly only worn by wealthy people. It is amazing what significance can be found in a biblical text if someone wants to prove what contradicts numerous other scriptures! We might just as well draw the equally-absurd conclusion that Jesus was attempting to *hide* His wealth, as He didn't also wear a seamless *outer* garment.

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<sup>1</sup> Prosperity preachers often use this fact to prove that Jesus' ministry was prosperous. There is no doubt that God supplied Jesus' needs so He could accomplish His mission. The difference between Jesus and the prosperity preachers is that Jesus wasn't selfish, and He didn't spend his ministry's money to personally enrich Himself.

Jesus had much more to say about money that we don't have space to consider. Let us, however, consider a few more of the common teachings of modern prosperity preachers who are so adept at twisting scriptures and deceiving the gullible.

### **"God Made Solomon Rich"**

This is the justification that many prosperity preachers use to disguise their greed. They fail to remember that God gave Solomon wealth for a reason. The reason was because, when God promised Solomon that He would grant any request, Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the people. God was so pleased that Solomon didn't ask for wealth (among other things) that along with wisdom He also gave him wealth. Solomon, however, didn't use His divinely-given wisdom as God intended, and he consequently became the most foolish man who ever lived. Had he been wise, he would have heeded what God said to Israel in the Law long before he was born:

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me," you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, "You shall never again return that way." Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself (Deut. 17:15-17).

Here is another scripture that prosperity preachers always ignore, following the example of Solomon who also ignored it to his own demise. And just like him, they also become idolaters. Remember that Solomon's heart was led astray to worship idols by his many wives, wives he could only have afforded because of the misuse of his wealth.

God intended that Solomon would use his God-given wealth to love his neighbor as himself, but Solomon used it to love only himself. He multiplied gold, silver, horses and wives for himself, in direct disobedience to God's commandment. He ultimately married seven hundred wives and possessed three hundred concubines, effectively robbing one thousand men of wives. Rather than giving to the poor, Solomon indulged himself. It is a great wonder that prosperity preachers hold up Solomon as a role model for every New Testament Christian in light of his selfishness and gross idolatry. Isn't our goal to become like *Christ*?

### **"God Made Abraham Rich, and Abraham's Blessings Are Promised To Us"**

This common justification is fabricated from Paul's words found in the third chapter of Galatians. I will quote the oft-misquoted verse, but within its context:

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." *So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.*

For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." Now that no one is justified by the law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." However, the law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is

written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—*in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles*, so that we would receive the promise of the spirit through faith (Gal. 3:8-14, emphasis added).

The “blessing of Abraham” of which Paul wrote in verse 14 was God’s promise to Abraham to bless all the nations *in him* (which Paul quoted in verse 8), or more specifically, as Paul explained just a few verses later, *in Abraham’s singular seed*, Jesus (Gal. 3:16). According to what we just read, Jesus provided that promised blessing to all the nations by being cursed by God, dying for the sins of the world on the cross. So the “blessing of Abraham coming to the Gentiles” is not about God making Gentiles materially wealthy like Abraham, but about God’s promise to Abraham to bless the Gentile nations through his seed—and its fulfillment by Jesus through His death on the cross for them. (Paul’s overriding theme here is that Gentiles can be saved by faith, just like Jews, through faith in Jesus.)

### **Another Twisting**

This same passage is often used in another way by prosperity preachers to justify their doctrine. They say that, because the law promised the curse of poverty to those who didn’t keep it (see Deut. 28:30-31, 33, 38-40, 47-48, 51, 68), and because Paul wrote, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law” in Galatians 3:13, we who are in Christ have been redeemed from the curse of poverty.

First, it is debatable that Paul was thinking of the specific curses found in Deuteronomy 28 when he wrote about “the curse of the law” from which Christ redeemed us. Notice that Paul didn’t say Christ redeemed us from the “curses” (plural) of the law, but rather the “curse” of the law, singular, perhaps implying that the whole law was a curse to those who tried to find salvation by keeping it. Once we are redeemed by Christ, we no longer would make the error of trying to save ourselves by keeping the law, and so we are in that sense “redeemed from the curse of the law.”

If Paul was actually saying that Christ redeemed us from every disastrous thing listed in Deuteronomy 28, thus guaranteeing our material prosperity, we would have to wonder why Paul once wrote of himself, “To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless” (1 Cor. 4:11). We would also have to wonder why Paul would write,

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom. 8:35-36).

Obviously, Paul would not have written those words if all Christians were exempt from suffering persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword by virtue of Christ’s having redeemed us from the curse of the law.

We would also have to wonder why Jesus foretold the following heavenly scene,

Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick,

or in prison, and come to You?" The King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, *to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine*, even the least of them, you did it to Me." (Matt. 25:34-40, emphasis added).

Thus there is little doubt that some believers who are "redeemed from the curse of the law" will find themselves in less-than-prosperous circumstances. Notice, however, that in the trying circumstances Jesus described, God met the needs of the suffering believers, and He did it through other believers who had more than they needed. *We can always expect that God will supply our needs, even if it temporarily seems otherwise.*

Finally, those prosperity preachers who want to be rich like Abraham should sincerely question if they want to live in a tent all of their lives without electricity or running water! Those whom God blessed with any degree of wealth in the Old Testament were expected to use their wealth for God's glory, sharing their abundance and providing for others. This Abraham did, providing employment for hundreds of people that supplied their needs (see Gen. 14:14). This also Job did, who also testified of using his wealth to care for widows and orphans (Job 29:12-13, 31:16-22). Those who are gifted to build businesses should make sure their chief business is to obey God and love their neighbor as themselves.

### **"Scripture Says That Jesus Became Poor So That We Could Become Rich"**

Indeed the Bible does say,

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

It is argued that since this scripture obviously means that Jesus was *materially* rich in heaven and became *materially* poor on earth, then *material wealth* is what Paul had in mind when he wrote that his readers might become *rich* through Christ's poverty. Surely, they say, if Paul was speaking of *material* wealth and poverty in the first part of the verse, he wouldn't have been speaking of *spiritual* riches in the second part.

If Paul actually meant, however, that we would become materially rich because of Christ' material poverty, we would have to wonder why he wrote just a few verses later in the very same letter,

I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure (2 Cor. 11:27).

If Paul meant in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that Christ became materially poor so that we could become materially rich, Christ's intention was certainly not being done in Paul's life! So obviously Paul did *not* mean that Christ became materially poor so that we could become materially rich on this earth. He meant that we would become spiritually rich, "rich toward God," to borrow an expression Jesus used (see Luke 12:21), and rich in heaven where our treasures and hearts are.

Is it really safe to assume that because Paul was speaking of *material* wealth in one part of a sentence that he could not possibly be speaking of *spiritual* wealth in another part or that sentence, as prosperity preachers claim? Consider the following words of Jesus addressed to some of His followers in the city of Smyrna:

I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)...(Rev. 2:9a).

Clearly, Jesus was speaking of the *material* poverty that the Smyrnan believers were facing, and then just four words later, He was speaking of the *spiritual* wealth of those same



believers.

### **“Jesus Promised a Hundred-Fold Return on Our Giving”**

Jesus did promise a hundred-fold return to those who make certain sacrifices. Let’s read exactly what He said:

Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Notice that this is not a promise to those who give money to preachers, as is often claimed by prosperity preachers. Rather, this is a promise to those who leave their homes, farm and relatives to go preach the gospel far and wide. Jesus promised such people “a hundred times as much now in the present age.”

But was Jesus promising that such people would become literal owners of one hundred houses or farms as some prosperity preachers claim? No, not any more than He was promising that such people would acquire one hundred literal mothers and one hundred literal children. Jesus was only saying that those who leave their homes and families would find that fellow believers would open their homes to them and welcome them as family among their families.

Notice Jesus also promised persecution and eternal life to such people. This reminds us of the context of the entire passage, in which the disciples had watched a rich young ruler who wanted eternal life walk sadly away as Jesus declared, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25).

The disciples were shocked at Jesus’ statement, and wondered then about their own chances of entering God’s kingdom. They reminded Jesus of what they had left behind to follow Him. That is when Jesus spoke His “hundred-fold” promise.

All of this being so, it is incredible that any prosperity preacher would attempt to persuade us that Jesus was promising a literal hundred-fold material return that would soon make us incredibly wealthy in a short time, in light of the fact that, seconds before, Jesus had told a rich man to sell everything and give the proceeds to charity if he wanted eternal life!

There are many other scriptures that prosperity preachers twist besides the ones we’ve considered, but space limits us in this book. Beware!

### **A Maxim to Remember**

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement in the Church of England, coined a wonderful maxim regarding the proper perspective of money. It is, “Make all you can; save all you can; give all you can.”

That is, Christians should first work hard, using their God-given abilities and opportunities to make money, but making sure they do so honestly and without violating any of Christ’s commandments.

Second, they should live frugally and simply, spending as little as possible on themselves, which enables them to “save all they can.”

Finally, having followed the first two steps, they should then “give all they can,” not limiting themselves to a tenth, but denying themselves as much as possible so that widows and orphans might be fed and the gospel proclaimed around the world.

The early church certainly practiced such stewardship, and sharing with the needy among them was a regular feature of New Testament life. Those first believers took

seriously Jesus' command to His followers, "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys" (Luke 12:33). We read in Luke's account of the early church:

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them....and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35).

Scripture is also clear that the early church fed and provided for the pressing needs of poor widows (see Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3-10).

Paul, the greatest apostle to have ever lived, entrusted by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles, human author of a large majority of New Testament epistles, considered ministering to the material needs of the poor an essential part of his ministry. Among the churches he founded, Paul raised large sums of money for poor Christians (see Acts 11:27-30; 24:17; Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 2:10). At least seventeen years after his conversion, Paul journeyed to Jerusalem to submit the gospel he'd received to the scrutiny of Peter, James and John. None of them could find anything wrong with the message he'd been preaching, and as Paul recounted the occasion in his Galatian letter, he remembered, "They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do (Gal. 2:10). In the minds of Peter, James, John and Paul, showing compassion to the poor was second only to the proclamation of the gospel.

### **In Summary**

On this subject, the best advice to disciple-making ministers comes from the apostle Paul, who after warning Timothy that the "love of money is a root of all sorts of evil," and saying that "some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many a pang," then admonished him,

*Flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11, emphasis added).*