

**Generosity • Leviticus 23:22 and 25:18-22**  
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Have you ever gotten financial advice that you didn't like? I have. My grandpa used to give me advice that I didn't like at first. He was almost always right, but I still didn't like it. I am going to share a piece of his financial advice that you too may not like. Now, I should give you some context to my grandfather, who passed away last year at the age of 96. He grew up during the great depression, fought in World War 2, and went to night school to pursue a better career for his family. He was a disciplined man, who was a vicious learner, and a true delight to be around. When it came to buying cars my grandpa had an odd outlook. He thought you should only buy what you can afford. How revolutionary? He told me that a car was meant to get you from point A to point B. He was very much about utility and not luxury. I also learned from him that you should pay cash for a car because you don't want to pay interest on something that depreciates in value. I learned from him that I should avoid car loans and monthly payments.

We followed his advice when we bought our Mazda 18 years ago. We were able to pay cash for that car and said no to all the upgrades that would have put us over the amount we had saved, which is why I have to manually roll down my windows. My daughter is getting close to the driving age and my goal is to see her drive the car we took her home from the hospital in when she was born. My grandpa followed his own advice when he bought a new car about 20 years ago. I thought he might buy something with a little more luxury since he had plenty of cash to buy whatever he wanted. He bought a based model Toyota Corolla.

That advice may be odd and you may disagree with it, and that is okay, but following his advice allowed us to have more financial margin in our lives. That margin allowed us to afford to move out of state for grad school. Having a car payment would have made that difficult to do. You may be thinking that my grandpa's advice was odd, but wait till you hear God's financial advice.

**Big Idea: God is an odd accountant.** We are going to encounter some strange financial advice from God today in the two passages we are going to read in the book of Leviticus. These two passages are going to promote financial practices that border on being outright foolish. The reason I believe God made these odd requests was to test his people. God was more concerned with the condition of their heart than the health of their accounts. Let's first look at God's odd financial request and then see the reasons behind these requests.

*Leviticus 23:22, <sup>22</sup> And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God."*

God doesn't want his people to maximize their profit margins. He instructed his people not to get everything they could from the yearly harvest of their crops. Imagine going to the

board of your company and telling them that you have a novel idea you would like to pitch to them. You open your proposal to the board of directors by saying, "I think we are making too much money. Therefore, I propose we shrink our profits." How do you think that proposal would go over? Not well, I imagine. God wanted his people to not only think about profits. He wanted them to also consider the poor. As New Testament believers, we are not to follow the specific laws of the Old Testament, but we can see the heart of God here. He doesn't want us to put profit over people. Maybe, this doesn't feel like too much of a stretch to you and all that odd. Wait till you see the next financial request God made to his people in Leviticus 25.

*Leviticus 25:1-7, "The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, <sup>2</sup> Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. <sup>3</sup> For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, <sup>4</sup> but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. <sup>5</sup> You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. <sup>6</sup> The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, <sup>7</sup> and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food."*

God was essentially telling his people to shut down their economy for a year. They were an agricultural economy and God instructed them to not plant or harvest for a whole year. During a sabbatical year, there was to be no systematic harvesting or seeding. The ground was to have a rest. Everyone could pick food from any field. I could pick an apple from a tree, as a part of my daily meal, but I could not pick all the apples from a tree and trade them. The Israelites were to act as they did in the wilderness wandering, picking fruit wherever they could find it. This time was especially beneficial to the poor. Taking a year off of work would be a significant economic burden and in Leviticus 25, God increased the time of rest for the land even more. During the Jubilee, the seventh sabbatical year, God asked them to take another year off, years 49 and 50 would be rest years. These two fallow years would have severely tested their faith. Imagine shutting down our economy for two years.

Why make these odd requests? Don't maximize your profits and take a year, and sometimes two years, off of work. These requests forced God's people to examine their hearts. These requests would test the genuineness of their care for the poor and the degree to which they trusted God to provide for them.

The instruction to leave a part of the harvest untouched followed Moses' teaching on the feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-21), which took place at the end of the harvest season and was a celebration recognizing the Lord's provision of food. It was his blessing that brought about the harvest, so it was appropriate that the people took time to thank the Lord. Moses' instruction was given in the context of gratitude. The people were reminded of

God's past provision while they were told to care for the poor. They shouldn't have worried that providing for the poor would jeopardize their well-being. God would provide for them while they provided for the poor. If Israel did business this way, God promised to bless their work. *Deuteronomy 24:19*, <sup>19</sup> *When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.* Maximizing profit may seem like wise financial advice. At the root of such a practice may lay a lack of trust in God's provision and care for people. Trusting in God's provision is the key to practicing generosity. This point is made even more clear in God's strange financial request in Leviticus 25.

*Leviticus 25:18-22*, <sup>18</sup> *Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely.* <sup>19</sup> *The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely.* <sup>20</sup> *And if you say, What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?* <sup>21</sup> *I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years.* <sup>22</sup> *When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop; you shall eat the old until the ninth year, when its crop arrives."*

God promised safety and satisfaction to his people twice in this passage. Safety was a primary concern. Raiders were common in the ancient Near East around the time of harvest. They could take in one day what took months of work to yield. This promise must have reassured the people of God, but his instruction to take a full year off still must have seemed impossible to survive. This sense of worry was expressed in the very honest question in verse 20. I would have asked that question. "How will I eat, if we take a whole year off?" God promised to give them a threefold harvest in the sixth year and to do this every seven years. It would be unfair to try and understand this type of yield as just good land planning. A threefold harvest doesn't happen naturally every seven years. This kind of yield could only be produced by a divine blessing. Yes, this advice sounds odd, but God promised to be faithful to his people if they followed his plan. We may not understand his plan or feel that it is the wisest move in the present, but our job is to obey and let God bless. Sadly, according to 2 Chronicles 36, Israel failed to keep God's commands concerning the sabbath years, which resulted in them being punished and losing the land.

**God is an odd accountant.** His advice is not aimed at maximizing your net worth. His primary concern is not profits, but people. He cares for the poor and those not yet following his Son, Jesus Christ. He wants us to handle our finances with other people in mind. He has promised to bless us while we prioritize his mission of proclaiming the good news of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's death and resurrection. Generosity starts with trust. We have to trust that God knows the best way to handle our resources.

Maybe you are here and you are saying to yourself, "I know I should be generous, but I can't afford it right now." Based on our passages today and the many other passages that

Speak to generosity in the scriptures, that statement is more about the amount of trust you have in God than the amount of funds you have in your account. We always have enough to be generous. That generosity may be small and that is okay. God expects us to give in proportion to what we have. Generosity should not be a future goal, but a present practice.

I want to reveal to you the opportunity that we have set up for you to be generous to the poor in a way that also proclaims the good news of Christ. At the end of this month, we are going to invite you to sponsor children in Nyagatare, Rwanda. We raised enough money on Easter to complete the church building in this growing city. Over the next several weeks, I would like for you to prayerfully consider sponsoring a child so they can receive a quality education, which will allow them to be qualified for the job opportunities that are coming to this developing city. We have an opportunity as a church to reshape a city. Your generosity can change someone's life. God will bless your generosity. Trust him.

Maybe you are here and you wouldn't yet call yourself a follower of Christ. I want you to know that I am so glad you are here. This is a safe place to explore your curiosity. As you consider the claims of Christ, I want to be upfront and honest with you about what it means to follow Jesus. I think it is only fair to be clear on the cost of following Jesus before you ask someone to follow him. I think it is fair for you to know that your net worth may go down if you start following Jesus. God's advice and your accountant's advice probably won't match up all the time. I would encourage you to see that having less is better when it's blessed. Having more and pursuing more often keeps us from seeing what is most important. I believe the more you look into the teachings of Jesus, you will start to see that a full bank account is not the purpose of your life.

### ----- Life Level Application -----

- 1) **Head:** Read Leviticus 26:27, 34-35 and 2 Chronicles 36:17-21. What warning did God give his people about the consequences they would suffer if they disobeyed his instruction on honoring the sabbath years? Did God's people heed this warning? How does God act on behalf of the land?
- 2) **Heart:** Read Leviticus 26:3-13. What blessings in this list stand out to you the most? Why? According to verse 3, what is the key factor in Israel experiencing these blessings?
- 3) **Hand:** Read Matthew 6:25-33. What things in life does Jesus tell us not to be anxious about? What human actions help us acquire these things? According to verse 33, what is the key factor in receiving these things?
- 4) **Habit:** What does seeking first "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" look like in your everyday life?