



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2019 New Year!

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There's probably no area of your life that's going to more define the trajectory of your life (what you're ultimately going to live for) than what you do with your money. When we're talking about money, we're not just talking about money. We're talking about your heart; we're talking about your values; we're talking about what matters to you; we're talking about what you live for. So, it's far more than just about money. I don't think anybody gets up in the morning and says, "I think I'll waste my life," but the reality is that it happens every day.

At the beginning of the decade we started what we called the Decade on Purpose. We encouraged people to think about (to frame) your life in the next ten years. One of the things that you want to frame in your life (that you want to make sure) is your areas of priority. At the end of the decade you want to look back and make sure: These are the things I didn't miss. Time is flying by! Think about whatever it was for you, that you determined, mattered. Has that been your priority? If not, then you need to rethink some things, because time is passing quickly and there are no do-overs.

It's very difficult to assess: How am I doing? What am I really living for? It's very easy to deceive ourselves into thinking: I love Jesus and I live for the Jesus stuff—and that's about as far as I go. But is that really true? Maybe you think it's just going to kind of work itself out. It's helpful to remind ourselves, that the Bible is very clear, that the overwhelming majority of people that will draw breath on planet Earth, will not live for the things that matter. The Bible is clear it will be a remnant; it will be the narrow road; it will be the few. So, if you think it's just going to probably work out, chances are that's not the case.

It's also easy to think: Because I'm really busy, I must be accomplishing something! I would suggest to you that the busyness in our culture is driven by the emptiness and the despair of our culture. Because we lack a sense of meaning and purpose, it drives the pace. If people stay busy, they don't have to look in the mirror and really deal with some difficult truths about their life and what they're living for. As a matter of fact, I would suggest to you, that people who really have a sense of what matters (a sense of a purpose in life) don't live these hectic, busy schedules. There's much more of a sense of rhythm. There's a sense of purpose. There's a sense of what matters and what doesn't matter, and what I need to be living for. So how do we assess how we're doing?

Biblically, two of the most accurate metrics (if you want to put it that way) is what we do with our time and with our money. Every time I say that, there are always people that push back. They feel like that isn't an accurate measurement. So, here's what we're saying: I'm really

serious about the Jesus thing, and just because Jesus doesn't get my time or doesn't get my money, doesn't mean it isn't a high value for me. Really? It is what it is. If Jesus doesn't get my time, if Jesus doesn't get my money, at some point I have to admit that the Jesus thing really doesn't matter that much to me. That's why it's quite a way down on my priority list.

Now, as soon as I say that, there are many people thinking: I'm thinking about my schedule; I'm thinking about my budget, and I don't have a lot of negotiable time. I don't have a lot of negotiable money. I understand that. Jesus is not asking for your leftover time and your leftover money. He's asking: What will it cost you to be a serious Christ-follower? At the end of the day, a value is just that—a value! In order to value the things of God, then we make judgments about what matters to us. There are certain things this year I won't have time to do, in order to value the things of God. There are certain things this year I won't have money to purchase, because I want to value the things of God. Thinking of a value system isn't just about: What is my leftover time and money? It's wrestling with the question: What will it cost me?

Now, about the time we say: I just don't have negotiable time and money, think of it another way. Imagine this morning, if I offered you a brand new, beautiful, luxurious log cabin in the mountains of Colorado. It can be yours free and clear. This is all it will cost you: for twelve months, \$100 a month and two hours of community service a week. If you do that for twelve months, it's all yours—free and clear! I'm going to guess, almost everybody in the room would suddenly find \$100 in your budget, and a couple hours a week for community service. Suddenly it's a value. Suddenly I have the time and the money to make it happen! That's how values work.

So, the question we want to wrestle with is: What will it cost you? I'm not asking you if you have leftover time and money. I'm asking you: What will it cost you to be a serious Christ-follower? There are brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world that it will cost them everything. So, what will it cost you?

In order to discuss this, I invite you to turn with us to 2 Samuel 24, where David makes one of the great stewardship statements in all of the Old Testament.

Without question, David was the greatest king in the history of Israel. Most scholars would say that while David was a great king, he made two major blunders while king. The first one most people are familiar with—his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. There were many consequences to that. He ended up having to murder Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. The baby produced through that relationship dies. David's family falls apart. Absalom, his son, leads a rebellion against David, drives David out of Jerusalem, and creates a civil war. Ultimately, Absalom is killed in battle. It breaks David's heart. He is put back on the throne. According to Nathan the prophet, all of those consequences were consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba.

Most people are very unfamiliar with the second major blunder. That is when David, at the end of his reign, took a census. That's what 2 Samuel 24 is about.

Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people." But

Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" (*NASB, 2Samuel 24:1-3)

So, God is angry with the Israelites; we break in mid-story. There's a lot of discussion as to exactly why, again, after years of idolatry and sin, (I'm not going to go into all of that), God is clearly angry with Israel. That's how Chapter 24 opens. This incites, it motivates David to take a census.

At first glance, we find ourselves thinking: What's the big deal? He's taking a census! You have to understand the motive behind David's decision. First of all, no king in Israel was allowed to take a census, because the purpose was to number the soldiers, in order to measure your military strength. That was the purpose of the census. Israel was not defined by its military power. It was not defined by how many soldiers were in the army. Israel was unique, in that their power was defined by the power of their God. So, God was very clear; it's never going to be on the basis of how many soldiers you have, or how great the military is. It's always going to be on the basis of My power to fight for you. Remember, in 1 Samuel, God won a tremendous victory over the Philistines without one single soldier. So, the kings were forbidden to take a census, because there was never to be this sense in which: It's by the size of our military that we shall prevail. What's happening is, that David knows that God is angry. David is assuming that it's possible that God will allow one of the neighboring enemies to invade and win a victory over them, as part of His discipline on them for their sin.

At this point, David, as their leader, should have led them into confession and repentance. But rather, what David is thinking is: I wonder if we're big enough and powerful enough as an army to do this without God's help. In other words, even if God allows this, are we big enough and strong enough to fight without God's favor?

So that was the motive behind taking the census. That's very clear when he gets to Joab, who was the general, or the commander. Joab knows exactly what David is doing, and he encourages David to rethink this. God could raise up any number of soldiers (hundreds of soldiers) that just trust God, because God is the source of our power. He encourages David to rethink the census, because he knows David's motive. But David insists. So, the text goes on to say that for nine months and twenty days, they counted heads in Israel and Judah. Joab came back with the number: ...eight hundred thousand soldiers in the north in Israel, and five hundred thousand soldiers in the south in Judah—1.3 million soldiers!

This part of the text is all about David's desire to be self-sufficient. Can we do this without God? Wouldn't it be true that the reason we don't have a lot of time or money for God, is because there's something deep within us that wants to be self-sufficient? The reason we don't pray more is very simple: I don't think I need to; I've got this figured out. I've got it wired! The reason we don't spend more time reading the Bible is very simple: I don't need to; I have it all figured out. I can do it myself!

In order to trust God, it requires faith! What if God doesn't come through? What if God oversleeps? What if God forgets about me? What if God doesn't come through for me? I think I'd like to be more self-sufficient! And so, our time and our money are invested in ourselves. I want to be in charge of my own pleasure. I want to be in charge of my own safety. I want to be in charge of my own security. I want to be in charge of my own retirement. I want to be self-

sufficient. That's why God moves so far down the priority list. It's the same thing David was struggling with.

Verse 10:

Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So, David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."

We really aren't told exactly what transpired, but somewhere in the journey of taking the census and getting the numbers in, David realizes the foolishness of his decision. He is clearly confessing his sin and repenting before God. If you read the story of Saul and the story of David, the difference, between the greatest king of Israel and a failed king, was not that Saul made mistakes and David didn't; both made mistakes. The clear and obvious difference was that David had a pattern of confession and repentance when he sinned. Saul never figured that out; always excuses, always reasons. He never really figured out what it meant to confess and repent of his sin before God. That was the difference. David is convicted. He confesses. He repents.

Then the text takes a strange turn. God sends the prophet Gad and the prophet gives David three choices for his judgment.

Now remember, God is angry with Israel for their sin, and now with David for his sin. So, there are three options: (1) You could have years of famine and drought in the land; (2) an invading army that will defeat you, or (3) three days of pestilence (disease). David opts for the pestilence.

So, we pick it up in Verse 15:

So, the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, "It is enough! Now relax your hand!" And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, "Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father's house." (Vs. 15-17)

Cara: Going back to the beginning of this story, my Bible translation says that God moved David against the people to number Israel. That makes it sound like God wanted David to take that census.

Bryan: Yeah. So, the translations are a little different. That verse is really kind of confused in the Hebrew, but I think the best translation is, God incited, rather than God moved. God incited David to number the people. Because as you go through the text, clearly, He didn't want the census taken. That becomes pretty obvious. God's anger is at the people; but that's then what incites David to do what he did.

Arnie: Bryan, David is the one who sinned. Yet, why in the world was it his people who suffered? That's just, to me, it's extremely sobering for any of us in leadership.

Bryan: It is sobering. In this particular case, that people were certainly not innocent. They're the people that God was angry with because of their idolatry. [Yeah.] So, it makes more sense in a text like this. But what I wrestle with is, what if David would have led them to repentance? How could the story have been different, instead of this defiance?

Cara: But what was the problem with taking a census?

Bryan: Taking a census was a way to assess the strength of your army. And the reason God didn't want the kings to do that is, He never wanted the nation to think that their strength was in the size of their army. But the strength was always in God as God. So, it was a forbidden practice.

Cara: So, what does God want then from his leaders today?

Bryan: So I think what God wants from spiritual leaders today is, to make sure that the focus stays on Jesus and not on the leader, and to point people to Him, not to themselves, and to remember this isn't about self-help, this is about surrender to God.

Arnie: So, when you think about fairness, okay, and I know the world's not fair, but was God's judgment on the people a judgment directed against David alone? Or was it the people as well?

Bryan: I think it's both. I think - we call it an editorial comment, and that is - in Verse One, the editor tells us that God was angry with the people. And the reason we're told that is to help us understand then, the people also came under the judgment of God. So, the editor is saying it's important that we know that. [Um hm. That's helpful. Okay.]

Cara: It makes it a little easier to understand [Yeah.] So, your suggestion of, what we do with our time and money is a good barometer of where we put our values, is pretty convicting actually, as you were speaking. But if we're serious about living for the things that matter, we have to look at those things, don't we?

Bryan: Yeah, we absolutely do. So, it is critical. I mean I've found over the years it's easy to say God is our priority, and Jesus is number one in our life. But the question we wrestle with is, is that true? And what I've found over the years is, most sincere Christians want to know the truth. It's painful. But we do want to know that. Another way to think about it, it's either going to be painful now, and we make the necessary adjustments, or it's painful at the end of the story, when there's no chance to make a change.