

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Why Should I?

by Dan Trygg

“Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days!” James 5:3

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future...” 1 Timothy 6:17-19

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints.” 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

The other day I had to put together the receipt letters for those who recently donated to DTM. Along with their receipt, we include a newsletter that has recent highlights or thoughts from the three ministers being supported. **DJ Jerome, Todd Crawford and I are ministering full-time, trusting God to supply our needs. None of us receives a salary. Our support is dependent upon contributions.** I spent the afternoon printing out the receipts, assembling the parts of the letter, folding pages, stuffing and addressing envelopes, and then, about 8:00 p.m., I drove the stack of mail to the post office. Even though this covered a longer period of time than normal (7 weeks), and there were a couple of *first-time* givers, I was impressed by how *small* a stack of envelopes it was! **There were only 39 people who donated to DTM during those seven weeks. 73% of our support comes from just 12 very generous individuals!** These are people who actually *tithe* (or *more!*) to support DTM workers. 9 people gave \$ 60.00 or less. The other 18 donors gave between \$100.00-\$400.00. Most of *these* are *regular supporters* of the work, as well. **Whether they *tithe* to underwrite our work, or just make a *regular commitment to give*, almost all of them are people we can *count on each month to help keep us going.*** As I carried that small pile of envelopes to the car, I was thinking, “How *precious* is the sacrifice and commitment expressed by each letter!” Each person’s gift is *personally felt* by us. No gift is nameless or faceless, lost in a pile of anonymous donors. Each donor values the work, and is a willing partner. **I was very *humbled*, and *amazed*, as I reflected upon the power of just a *few individuals to make a difference*, ...to underwrite a full-time ministry worker, even in middle class America! 39 people make it possible for *three men to be wholly devoted to do ministry work*, ...to do personal witnessing and spiritual counseling, to teach Bible studies and do discipleship training, to do hands-on service work to help people in need in practical ways, to teach NT Greek classes and to write and distribute study materials, to lead group meetings in restaurants and homes, to organize and facilitate prayer meetings with other believers each week.**

*The very next morning*, I was talking with someone who related a distinctly different story. He had been talking with someone about helping people in need. This person’s response was, “**Why should I?**” It was not spoken as an honest question of inquiry, but as a comment of *dismissal*. “**It is not my responsibility.**” **The contrast of *this attitude and mindset from my musings of the night before was dramatic!* Just because he had an abundance, he did not see that he would have an obligation or charge from God to help another person in need. Instead of seeing the heart of sacrifice and generosity I had just been strongly impressed with by those DTM donors, *this comment seemed to express a totally different heart-attitude and spirit. It smacked of conceit, greed and arrogant selfishness.***

**Of course, in one respect he is right. Just because a person has relative wealth does not mean that he is obligated to give it all away.** Each person has a choice. Each person is a steward of his time, opportunities and possessions. *Just because* someone has *more*, does not mean that they *have to* share it. **Everyone is responsible for his own goods and possessions. The Bible clearly teaches the value and reality of *private property*.** It is not OK for people to just come into your house and take your property for themselves. That is *your* home, *your* property. **Those who would take what is *yours*, without due legal process, are *thieves and robbers!* If there is anything God stands for, it is for the *power of individual choice and self-determination.* That said, however, **He also is very clear on *personal responsibility and accountability.*** We can’t just do what *we* want. **We are answerable to Him!****

Let’s back up and take a look at the big picture of what the Bible teaches: **(1.) God is the Creator and Owner of all. It all belongs to Him** (Psa. 24:1; 50:10-12; Hab. 2:8; I Chr. 29:11,16). **(2.) What we *have* comes from God.** God

gives us the ability to make wealth. Riches and honor come from Him, indeed *everything* comes from Him! (Deut. 8:17,18; I Sam. 2:7; I Chr. 29:12-14; Psa. 75:6,7) **(3.) God entrusts us with what we have, as stewards and tenants.** As those word pictures suggest, He *expects* something from us. Our possession is only temporary, and we will have to answer to Him concerning what we do with what He lends to us. (I Chr. 29:15; I Cor. 4:1,2; cf. Matt. 25:13-46; Lk. 12:15-34; 16:1-15). **(4.) Work is to be part of the human experience.** It was a creative, productive experience before the fall, but because of human sin, *toilsome* labor is required to make a living. We must work to survive and prosper. There is generally a *return* or *reward* for the investment of work. Those who refuse to work will usually experience poverty. Sometimes those consequences are important to learn responsibility (Prov. 10:4; 16:26; 19:15; II Thess. 3:10). **(5.) Not all people can work, or earn enough to survive. This can happen for many reasons, not just laziness. God has provided enough for all people, but human sin and injustice bring ruin, oppression, starvation and poverty** (Prov. 13:23; Ecc. 5:8; Ezk. 22:29). Sickness, disability, unemployment, famine, natural disasters, family disruption, displacement and other factors can render people unable to fend for themselves. **(6.) God is concerned for the rights and needs of the poor** (Psa. 113:7; 140:12; Isa. 58:1-11), and those who are righteous will be also (Prov. 29:7; 31:8,9; cf. Jer. 5:28,29; Ezk. 16:49,50). Those who disregard *them* dishonor *God*, and bring judgment on themselves (Prov. 14:31; 17:5; 21:13; 28:27). **You cannot walk in agapē-love, and disregard the poor** (I Jn. 3:17). **(7.) God has called some people to devote themselves to ministry full-time. They need support from others to carry out the mission God has called them to.** Their ministry is their work. God intends for them to be supported by tithes, offerings and contributions (Num. 18:21-24; I Cor. 9:1-14). **(8.) God calls those who have the means to do what they can to help those in need.** This is taught in both the OT and NT (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35,39; Deut. 15:4-11; Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35; I Cor. 16:1-3; II Cor. 8,9).

**Three times in the NT we are warned against storing up earthly riches for ourselves** (Matt. 6:19; Lk. 12:21; Jas. 5:3). **(a.) In Matthew 6, the issue is about who your master is, where your treasure is, where your heart is.** It is very clear, “You *cannot* serve two masters. ... You *cannot* serve God and mammon.” “Mammon” is an Aramaic word, derived from a form of “what is trusted in, treasured”. It was commonly used for worldly wealth and riches. The Syrians actually had a god named “Mammon”, the god of wealth, whom they worshiped and served. **Simply stated, you are either trusting God, ...or you are trusting that other thing you trust. You can’t do both.** One is going to win out. Either you will love one and disregard the other, or you will hold to one and abandon the other. **Jesus clearly advocates investing in the Kingdom of God, by giving away your worldly wealth.** **(b.) In the passage in Luke 12:15-33, Jesus is asked to arbitrate the inheritance of two brothers. He refuses, and warns, “Watch out and guard yourselves against every form or greed** (or, ‘covetousness’ – the Greek word literally means ‘having more’), for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things being to him.” He then tells the parable of the rich fool, the man who had a *bumper crop*, and decided to *build bigger barns* to hold all the excess, *so he could have a secure future for many years.* Little did he realize that his life was required of him *that night!* Jesus’ comment, “So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” **Jesus’ prescription? Don’t be anxious.** Look at the birds, they don’t need barns. You are more valuable to God than them. **Sell your possessions and give to the poor; make for yourselves... an unfailling treasure in heaven.** “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (vss. 22, 33,34) **(c.) James 5:1-6 is a word of judgment against the rich.** Clearly alluding to Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 6:19f.), James charges that their garments are moth-eaten, and **their gold and silver have corroded. The corrosion itself will be a witness against them,** and will corrode their own flesh like burning. In exasperation, he exclaims, “You store up treasure in the last days!” **Instead of selling their possessions and utilizing their money and resources for Kingdom business, they have stored it up for themselves!** In a time of great need, and monumental challenge, they have been more concerned about their *own* luxury and pleasure than about *fair wages for their workers, or the lives of righteous people.* **James accuses them of condemning and murdering the righteous.** Strong words. Certainly, by *not* intervening to help, these wealthy turn a blind eye and a deaf ear toward those in need, treating them as though they were of no value, as dead men, and condemning them to their fate. The apostle John pointed out that when a person of means *sees someone in need, and closes his heart* against him, “how does the love of God abide in him?” **This attitude of “Why should I help?” is not from the heart of Jesus.** He was willing to give up *His* comfort, *His* power, *His* glory, and become poor, so that *we* could have life, and be rich toward God (II Cor. 8:9). **The one who asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” was Cain, ...the first murderer of his brother!**

**When you read II Corinthians 8:1-4, you see a very different heart!** *These people were ready, eager to do whatever they could to help their brethren, whom they had never even met!* **In spite of their own poverty, they gave freely and sacrificially to minister to their fellow Christians.** Many of the DTM supporters I mentioned are also like this. Of the 12 most generous givers, only two are well-to-do, white-collar people. The rest are blue collar workers, even some who are retired. Instead of guarding their pennies, they are investing generously in the Kingdom. **They are not cowed by fear of the future, or anxious about what is temporal. They are investing in things that are eternal.**