

*renewing and enriching life*

# revive

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GENE **R**OSITY  
VS  
GR **E**ED





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# GETTING OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

**There** is a common myth that has been spread by certain misinformed people that India is a “spiritual” country while America and other western nations are “materialistic” countries.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As an Indian born in India, I can say without doubt that Indians suffer from the same materialistic impulses as Americans or any other people.

In fact, India is infested with examples of materialism rampant bribery in government, a caste system that places value upon people based upon their economic wealth, dowry deaths. India is marked by a dog-eat-dog business world, the common presence of certain gods and goddesses in the home to insure material well-being, and literal wars between different classes that result in hundreds of deaths. The ambition for riches ruins many families and marriages in India, including those of Indian Christians.

As Christians, we sometimes make the mistake of equating the presence of riches as a sign of materialism. But the Bible has numerous examples of rich people who nevertheless followed after God and got their priorities straight, including Abraham, Job, and some of the women who followed Jesus.

God has gifted some people with the ability to make money, and who are investing wisely in the kingdom of God. Businessman R.G. LeTourneau, a devout Christian, manufactured earthmoving equipment. He committed himself to using most of his wealth to found a Christian university and fund various Christian causes.

LeTourneau is an excellent example of a life that lived out a biblical truth enunciated by John Wesley:

“Make all the money you can,  
Save all the money you can,  
Give all the money you can.”

The Bible tells us that it is not riches, but the longing

for riches that traps us. Materialism is the coveting of goods in this life to the exclusion of gathering treasures in the life to come. It is not what we have in our bank accounts that make us materialists but our desire for such things to the detriment of our relationship with God. The love of money is a form of idolatry.

Paul warns us that our longing for money will cause us to wander from faith. It will cause us to pierce ourselves with many griefs. Coveting money is a snare leading to many foolish and harmful desires. All of us can point to examples in our own situations where this is true.

If God has given you the ability to make money, He also gives you special precautions and recommendations for living: (1) avoid conceit, (2) what you have today can be gone tomorrow, (3) use your wealth to become rich in good works, (4) fix your hope upon God, and (5) pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

A little-known character of the Bible, named Agur the son of Jakeh, once prayed a prayer that captures the attitude we all need to have: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or that I not be in want and steal and profane the name of my God.” (Proverbs 30:8b-9)

During his youthful days, King Solomon desired wisdom more than wealth. God answered him with wisdom and gave him wealth, too. Unfortunately, in his later years, Solomon allowed his wealth and power to control him. He married 700 foreign and pagan wives, gave himself to material pleasures and forsook the Lord.

Solomon’s pursuit of worldly things only led him to deep frustration and despair. Later, he said of his experience that it was all “vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). Instead of giving him fullness and satisfaction, he knew only pain and sorrow. “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much,” he concluded, “but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

In short, Solomon sadly learned that money is a good servant but a poor master.

Solomon’s experience reminds us of the words of Jesus, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

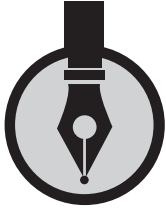
Let us be sure to get our own priorities straight.

Father God, deliver me from the trap of materialism. From this day, I resolve to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness. Through your Holy Spirit, help me follow through on the commitment I make this day.

In Jesus’ Name. ●

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# revive

renewing and enriching life

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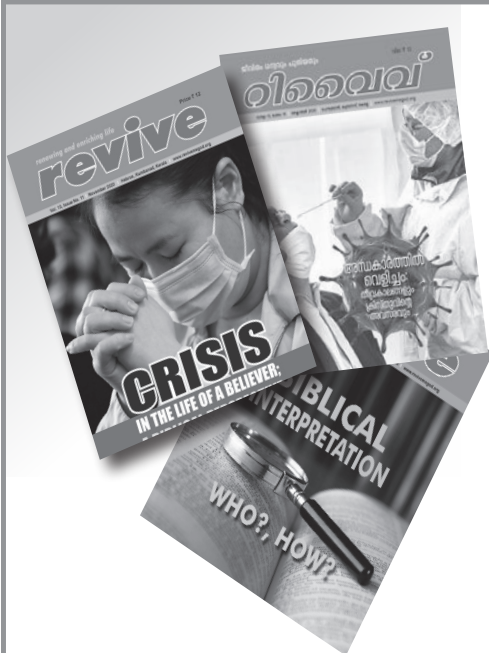
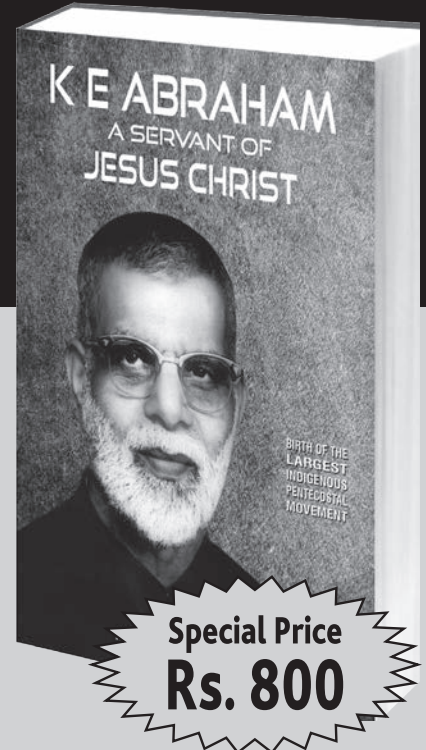
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Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

# GENEROSITY

**According** to David Jeremiah, in 1981, Albert started working at the Children's Hospital of Pittsburg, cleaning and polishing shoes for \$5 a pair. Satisfied customers often tipped him, usually a dollar or two.

One Christmas, a customer gave Albert \$50 for shining one pair of shoes. Big tips like that were rare, of course, and over the years, as style changed, Albert saw his business dwindle. In 2013, Albert retired after thirty-two years on the job. There was a farewell party. Hospital staff and administrators spoke of how much he would be missed. But when he walked out the door on his last day, his influence at that hospital continued.

Why? Because during all those years of shining shoes, Albert Lexie donated more than thirty percent of his earnings to the hospital's Free Care Fund, which helps cash-strapped parents pay for their children's medical expenses. And those tips? He gave every single one to the hospital, more than \$200000 dollars in all.

That's why David Jeremiah said, "Generosity is not about what's in your bank account-it's about what's in your heart." If Lexie comes from the lowest rung

of society, Charles Feeney comes from the other end. He was a billionaire with a simple philosophy of "giving while you are living." By 2016, he had given more than \$ 8 billion to charitable organizations around the world.

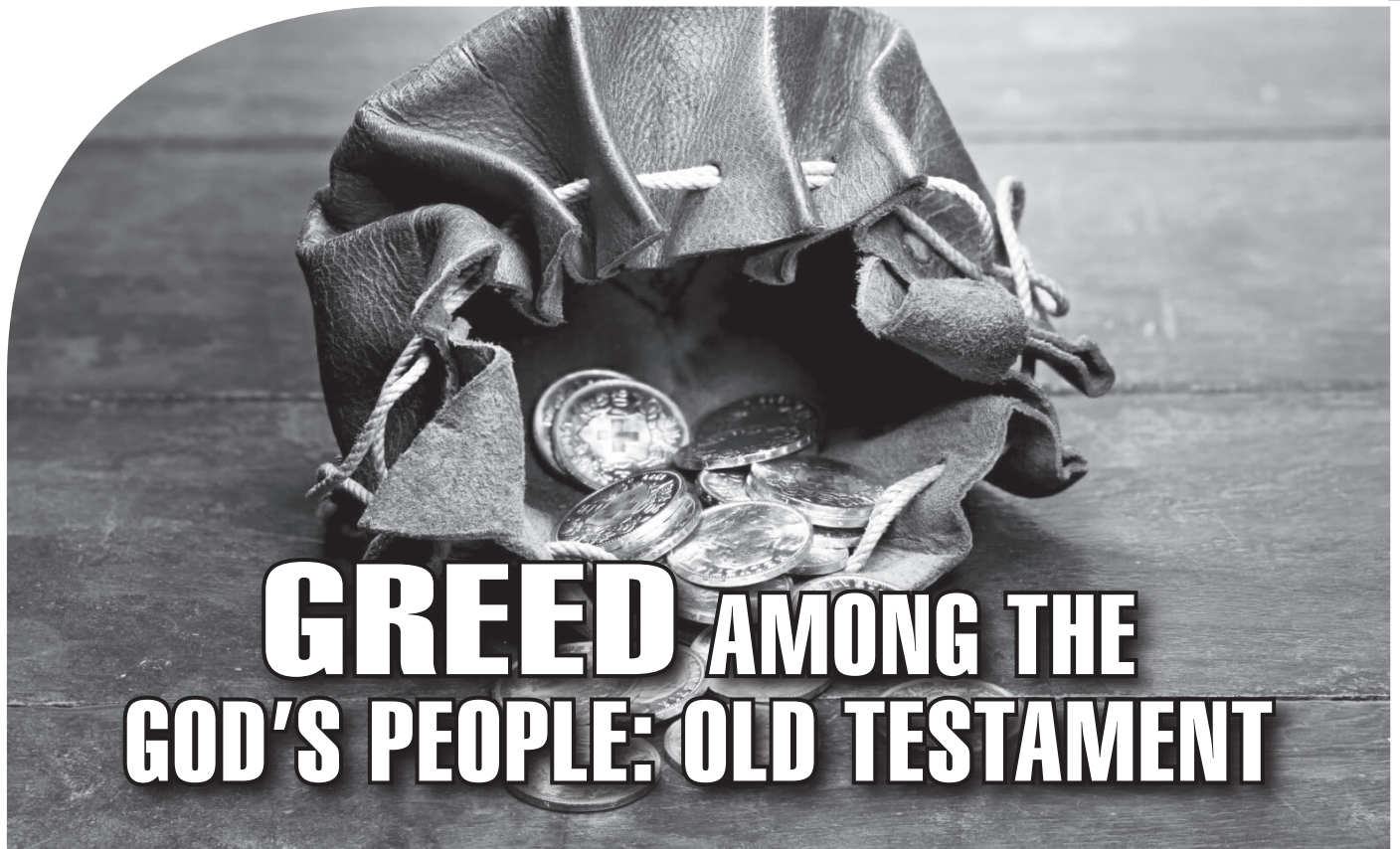
It is said about Charles Feeney that he never owned a house or a car. Until he was seventy-five, he traveled by coach, not first class. He wore simple clothes, an inexpensive plastic watch, and preferred hamburgers at his favorite local restaurant. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "***It is better to give than receive.***" Barnabas in the New Testament was an exuberant giver. It is written in the Scriptures that, "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means, son of encouragement) sold a field he owned and bought the money and put it at the apostle's feet" (Acts 4: 36). True giving must come from the heart and it is a blessing. As it says,

He who earns is an industrious man,

He who spends is a well-furnished man.

He who saves is a prepared man.

He who gives is a blessed man. ●



# GREED AMONG THE GOD'S PEOPLE: OLD TESTAMENT



**PR. JOSE K.G., CHICAGO**

Former Principal of  
Faith Theological Seminary  
and Bible Teacher.

Now pastoring a church  
in Chicago

## Greed and the Bible

Even though we do not consider greed so serious, the Bible looks at it differently. It is a “desire for more than one needs or deserves.” It does not refer merely to material things but hunger for power, striving for power, effort to take the greater share, to take advantage of any situation, will to press one’s advantage, selfishness or seek something by force. Greed is not just a social evil, but rather the greatest evil. The greedy become the enemy of all. Their inter-personal relationship will not last as they try to manipulate every human or divine relationship merely for personal gain. The ideal of being without needs helps to escape greed. Thus, the wealthiest person is the one with minimum needs and the poorest are the greedy who do not know how much they need. Philosophy teaches one to be above greed.

The Bible uses this term to mean eager, unrestrained, insatiate longing, particularly for wealth or gain. It is also used to mean craving for food and drink. It is a serious sin in the Bible which is identified as idolatry (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). And the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord (Pss 10:3). The last commandment is a warning against the greedy (Ex 20:17). According to Jer. 22:17 greed sets aside the rights of others. Greed is the source of an unhappy life. They lose everything in search for more. Greed leads to foolish lusts. Our view of material things is godliness with contentment. Welcoming with equanimity, pleasure and pain, acquisitions and losses, victory and defeat are the quality of a man of God. Greed consumes not only time and energy but also values.

## Jubilee

The most important control over human greed among the people of God is



the law of Jubilee. The word "jubilee" is derived from the Hebrew word 'jobel,' which means "ram's horn"; since it was precisely that horn which was used as a trumpet, whose sound indicated to everyone the beginning of the Jubilee Year. During the Day of Atonement, the blowing of a ram's horn would indicate that the Year of Jubilee began (Num 36:4). The book of Leviticus tells us the significance of the jubilee year, a year of liberation "par excellence," which is at the end of seven weeks of years, the fiftieth year (Lev 25:8-10). The sources of these laws are found in Leviticus 25, Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 16.

Leviticus 25 ordains a sabbath year, one in every seven (Lev 25:1-7), and a jubilee year, one in every fifty (25:8-17), to sanctify Israel's internal economy. During this year, the Israelites were not supposed to reap or harvest; it was a time for people to return to their families. The Bible

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places a special emphasis on the number 7. After all, there are seven days in a week, and the seventh day is supposed to be the Sabbath, a day dedicated to rest and worship:  $7 \times 7 = 49$  years. After seven years of Sabbaths, they reach the 50th year. In the sabbath year, each field was to lie fallow, which appears to be a sound agricultural practice. The year of jubilee was much more radical. Every fiftieth year, all leased or mortgaged lands were to be returned to their original owners, and all slaves and bonded laborers were to be freed (25:10). The underlying intent is the same as seen in the law of gleaning (Lev 19:9-10), to ensure that everyone had access to the means of production, whether the family farm or simply the fruits of their own labor.

The feasts of the Hebrew calendar are also marked by seven days; such is the duration both of the feast of the unleavened (bread) and of the feast of the tabernacles. The feast of Pentecost is celebrated seven weeks after the Saturday of Passover. Because everyone was released from debts and slavery, everyone got to rest during this year and was able to start off the next year with a clean slate. It was to ensure that everyone has access to the means of making a living and escaping multi-generational poverty.

In the 7th and 8th years the people were to live on what the fields had produced in the 6th year and whatever grew spontaneously. This shows the reason why we may say that one of the factors constituting the Jubilee Year was the "simple life." They could not help but live simply for two consecutive years. Nobody can deny that this afforded ample opportunity to develop the habit of living within very limited means. It was not the simple life as such that He had in view, but rather the laying down of its moral and religious foundations. "What shall we eat in the seventh year?" "Then I will command my blessing upon you." There is no simplicity of life without true faith in Him. Perhaps they signally failed in it, and if so, we should not be surprised at all. Not that the institution in itself was cumbered with any obstacles that could not have been overcome; but what is more common than unbelief and unwillingness to trust absolutely in Yahweh?

Jubilee clarifies how faith in God also carries Israel's culture, in work, and in relationships. It is not tolerable that, because of debt or poverty, a family or

a father be deprived of his land forever, since the land comes from God and is a fruitful gift for man. From this, the detailed divine laws which idealistically intervene to promote justice and hope. The orientation is clear: it questions, challenges, presses to accept the gift and to promote a culture of freedom. An Israelite may only be held for a maximum of six years before he is released. He cannot be a slave in the full sense of the word but can only be a bonded laborer.

### The Context of Debt and Loss of Land

There are certain life situations that make one to fall into debt. The first is the context of a person could simply become poor. A farmer who borrowed money from the neighbor to buy seed but did not harvest enough to repay the loan. He therefore must sell some of the land to a buyer in order to cover the debt and buy seed for the next farming. If there was a person who belonged to the farmer's clan who wished to act as a "redeemer", he could pay the buyer according to the number of remaining annual crops until the jubilee year when it reverted to the farmer. Until that time, the land belonged to the redeemer, who allowed the farmer to work it.

Secondly, when the land was not redeemed and the farmer again fell into debt from which he could not recover, he would forfeit all of his land to the creditor (Lev 25:35-38). The creditor must lend the farmer the money necessary to continue working as a tenant farmer on his own land, but must not charge him interest. The farmer would amortize this loan with the profit made from the crops, perhaps eliminating the debt. If the loan was not fully repaid before the jubilee, then at that time the land would revert back to the farmer or his heirs.

Thirdly, when the farmer could neither pay on the loan or even support himself and his family, he would become bound to the creditor (Lev 25:39-43). As a bond laborer he would work for wages, which were entirely for reduction of the debt. At the year of jubilee, he would regain

his land and freedom. Throughout these years, the creditor must not treat him as a slave, sell him as a slave, or rule over him harshly. The creditor must "fear God" by accepting the fact that all of God's people are God's slaves.

### The Principle of Restoration

The year of jubilee operated within the context of Israel's kinship system for the protection of the clan's inalienable right to work their ancestral land, which they understood to be owned by God and to be enjoyed by them as a benefit of their relationship with Him. The People who sold themselves must retain the right to buy themselves out of slavery if they prospered. If not, a near relative could intervene as a "redeemer" who would pay the foreigner according to the number of years left until the jubilee when the impoverished Israelites were to be released.

There is a dispute between two systems of land ownership, inheritance and possession. This difference is rooted in a dispute between Yahweh and Baal. Yahweh is the champion of land as inheritance; Baal is the sponsor of land as possession that leads, in turn, to commoditization. The jubilee affirms that the Lord is not only the God who owns Israel's land; He is sovereign over everything. His act of redemption from Egypt committed Him to provide for them on every level because they were His own. Therefore, Israel's observance of the Sabbath day and year and the year of jubilee was a function of obedience and trust. It also calls on the rich to trust that treating creditors compassionately will still yield an adequate return.

The smallest unit of Israel's kinship structure was the household that would have included three to four generations. The jubilee provided a socio economic solution to keep the family even in the face of economic calamity. Family debt was a reality in ancient times as it is today, and its effects include a frightening list of social ills. The jubilee sought to check these negative social consequences by limiting their duration



so that future generations would not have to bear the burden of their distant ancestors. God desires just distribution of the earth's resources. The land of Canaan was assigned equitably among God's people. The jubilee was not about redistribution but restoration. The jubilee was a critique against private accumulation of land and large-scale forms of nationalization that destroy family ownership.

After the bitter experience of the Babylonian exile, when they lost the land, the temple and their own consistency as a people; a horizon of hope and freedom opened up (Isa 61:1-3). The prophet heralds a year of the Lord's favor which is liberation and consolation. Liberation is from physical evils and consolation is a transformation to joy. City, countryside, experiences of rural work and sheep farming are tied up in a novelty of life more human and more constructive.

Its widespread neglect occurred not

“  
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 ”

because the jubilee was unfeasible, but because the wealthy were unwilling to accept the social and economic implications that would have been costly and disruptive to them. In essence, any sale of land was really a term lease that could last no longer than the next year of jubilee. This provided a means for the destitute to raise money without depriving the family's future generations of the means of production.

### God Loves Rest

The Lord marks the times of work and of rest. This matters because God takes rest seriously. He doesn't want His people to make work an idol, thinking that if they plant and harvest enough, they can provide for their needs on their own. No matter what rest looks like, God wants His people to trust Him



each week, each month, and each year. It would make sense for God to institute a year of rest. He establishes a weekly Sabbath because He doesn't want us to rely on our own work to sustain us fully. He asks to trust Him to provide when we cannot provide for ourselves. A Year of Jubilee tells us that we are not machines but created to enjoy creation and God. God does not approve of anything that holds humans in bondage. The observance of the sabbatical year—which included rest for the land, freedom for Hebrew slaves and cancellation of debts for the poor—should have functioned to reduce the gap between rich and poor.

Rest meant that their wandering in the wilderness had come to an end and Israel could enjoy security, even though

**It's important to note that God owns everything. Therefore, the Israelites would dedicate this year of rest to him, acknowledging that God would provide for their needs. Vegetation won't grow if people overwork the land.**

surrounded by enemies (Pss 95:7-11; Heb 3:7-4:11. Mat 11:28-29). On the one hand, 'rest' may be experienced now by everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus and finds 'rest for the soul', even though they still live in a world which is full of uncertainty and far from secure.

It's important to note that God owns everything. Therefore, the Israelites would dedicate this year of rest to him, acknowledging that God would provide for their needs. Vegetation won't grow if people overwork the land. Therefore, by instituting the year of rest, the land has time to recover and produce a bountiful harvest in future years to come. In fact, part of the reason the Israelites went into captivity was that they didn't observe Jubilee. They didn't trust that God would provide, and dedicate time to resting.

One of the great themes of the sabbatical and jubilee years in the Bible

is freedom. The people of God should be able to enjoy the freedom which he has given them, and if that is not the case then action must be taken to restore that freedom, liberation of slaves and provision of capital so that they can make a new start as free men and women. The Bible does not only promise better things in heaven for the oppressed but encourages concrete action to bring them freedom from suffering in this world.

Restoration of all that which in the course of time was perverted by man's sin, in the removing of all slavery of sin, in the establishing of the true liberty of the children of God, and in the delivering of the creation from the bondage of corruption to which it was subjected on account of man's depravity. They should never lose sight of their being brothers and citizens of theocratic kingdom. They owed their life to God and were subject to His sovereign will. Only through loyalty to Him were they free and could ever hope to be free and independent of all other masters.

### Failure and Judgment

The jubilee year was observed but only irregularly. Jewish tradition, as preserved in the Talmud, assumed that the sabbatical and jubilee years were observed regularly in Israel until the Exile; but after that the jubilee year became irrelevant because the Judeans no longer lived on their original family property as assigned when they first entered the promised land. It would appear that the jubilee year was not observed regularly in ancient Israel. However, the values enshrined in the institution were clearly important for the people. They understood land as family property, on the basis of their conviction that the land was given by the Lord God to his people. Therefore, they were reluctant to buy and sell land, though no doubt it did happen on occasions; and there are several examples of the redemption of family property in the OT.

In Isaiah 61:1-3 the messianic age is described as 'the year of the Lord's

favor' (v. 2a), an idea which draws at least some of its inspiration from that of the Jubilee. One of the prophet's tasks is to 'proclaim liberty', a distinctive phrase found in the jubilee regulations. In the messianic age, according to the prophet's message, the poor and the oppressed will be freed from their suffering (Isa. 61:2b-9). The expression 'day of vengeance of our God' seems to indicate that freedom for the oppressed will be accompanied by judgement on the oppressors. In accordance with the principle of 'restoration' in the jubilee year, ruined cities and deserted habitations will be restored (v. 4).

There are many similarities between Isa 58 and the jubilee regulations. The chapter is opened with the simile of a trumpet (v. 1). The theme of the chapter is true fasting (vv. 3-6), the only fast legislated for in the Law is the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29-31), and the jubilee year begins precisely on the Day of Atonement (Lev 25:9). True fasting is to provide shelter, food and

clothes for the poor, and not to close their eyes to the needs of their fellow Israelites, matters which are also mentioned in the regulations for the jubilee year.

### Conclusion

Is there an hour you can set aside, rest and be with God? The purpose of the Year of Jubilee is to turn our anxieties away from our debts, our jobs, our busy lives, and reflect on God as our provider. Jesus described himself as having come to "preach the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61: 1-2) in jubilee year.

When we understand Jesus' resurrection as the inaugural act of "remaking" in God's creation it becomes clear that God's people are meant to be a foretaste of what God wants to do for the entire creation. The church is called to be a new community that marks the kingdom of God breaking into the world. Jubilee reminds us that God expects the church to challenge worldly imperfection through their relationships with each other and the pursuit of justice.

A Spirit-filled church which is committed to discipleship will actually care for the poor because that's all in the year of Jubilee. The essence of Jubilee is God's inspired vision to interrupt the status quo and reset the way of life for God's redeemed and liberated people, emphasizing the relationships between humanity, creation and God. Within the reality of life in a world of broken relationships, Jubilee is an expression of God's desire for all of creation to flourish. ●

**Restoration of all that which in the course of time was perverted by man's sin, in the removing of all slavery of sin, in the establishing of the true liberty of the children of God, and in the delivering of the creation from the bondage of corruption to which it was subjected on account of man's depravity.**



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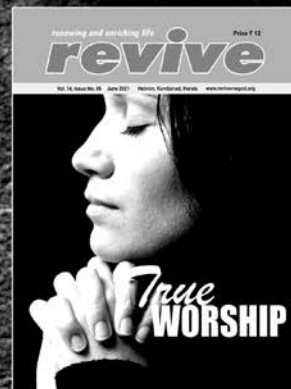
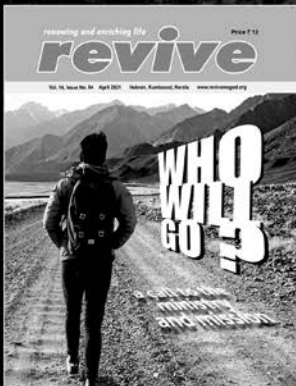
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# DISCIPLES CHOOSE GENEROSITY



**DR. J.N. MANOKARAN**

A Civil Engineer by profession. God called him and his family to be a missionary leader in Haryana as cross-cultural missionaries for eleven years.

Since 1997 they returned back to Tamil Nadu to help missionaries and pastors to build their capacities by teaching, training and writing.

**Generosity** is a spiritual choice. Giving is not just for the rich, it is for the poor too. Paul writes that the Macedonian church believers gave out of poverty. (II Corinthians 8:1-5) Disciples who love the Lord choose generosity.

## I. Learning to Give

Giving does not come naturally. In the 19th century when missionaries served in South India, they taught them to be generous. It is not just money, it could be in kind like rice, vegetables, eggs, chicks, time, encouraging words, counsel, knowledge... etc. It does not become a people's movement until this becomes a biblical practice, experience blessings and see in context of Kingdom vision. Credit goes to Bishop V.S. Azariah, who mobilized women to separate a handful of rice (pidiarisi) and save it separately whenever they cook for family. This collected rice is brought to the church as offering. People who experienced famine, knew the value of a handful of rice, gave enthusiastically and cheerfully. This was the foundation for more giving – vegetables, eggs, chicks then of course money. Least coin movement, when a person sets aside the specific coin, whenever he gets for mission. Thousands of families living in poverty, when they embraced Christian faith and learnt the 'grace of giving' they were lifted out of poverty and became 'middle class' and many 'middle class' Christians who gave generously have become 'rich and prosperous' today.

## II. Standard of giving

One Bible teacher was invited to speak in a mega church. He had conversation with a prominent member of the church. The member was bragging about his faith journey. "When I came to this church ten years ago, I came riding a cycle. Then God blessed me with a motor bike. Now I own a Hyundai car. Next year, I plan to buy a Honda city. My two children are now studying in the best English medium school in the city. They are planning to study abroad. We have moved from two room apartment

to four room villas. In short, God has prospered me and raised my standard of living.”

The Bible teacher said: “Praise the Lord. It is wonderful testimony. Do you know why God increases our wealth?”

He replied: “God wants us to be prosperous, blessed, rich, and wealthy in this world.”

“Is there any purpose for the blessings or prosperity?” asked the teacher. The person who called himself as blessed did not know ‘Why’ God has exalted him.

The Bible teacher explained: “God raises our standard of living to test us; are we better stewards? When standard of living goes up, our standard of giving should go up.”

He was puzzled and gave a sheepish smile. The teacher explained: “Brother you gave 10% (tithe) to the Lord when you came on a bicycle, the same percentage when you came on a motor bike; obviously the same percentage when you are coming in your car. Have you increased the percentage of your giving?”

### III. Money and Wealth

For some money is ‘good’ and some miss one ‘o’ and is ‘god’; for some money is equal to God but not god yet. There are many who see money as evil or devil or equal to devil. But all said and done, money is an enigma for most of humanity. Money and wealth are considered as security by many. Having enough money will provide secure future. In case of emergency, like sickness, this would help. (Some may have medical insurance). Or a business loss could be offset if there is enough money. Wealth if money in different forms: shares or assets or real estate or gold. The

values for these are expected to go up, so when converted to cash, the money is larger than the amount invested. In a way, surplus money is channeled into creating wealth. Some time, people try to create future wealth by savings and investing. Few have surplus money, which they like to use it for themselves. That is beyond their need, which could be termed as multiplying the comfort and taken to extreme level termed as luxury.

#### 3.1. In Vs out

Human beings do not bring anything – material thing into the world. So, they do not bring money or wealth with them when they are born. Similarly, they cannot take anything with them. Naked you come into the world and naked you go away from the world. Job declares that he came naked from mother’s womb and would return naked i.e., without any wealth from the earth. (Job 1:21) That means the money and wealth could be used only while living on earth, hence it belongs to the world, and it could termed as worldly or earthly.

#### 3.2. Temporal Vs. Eternal

Is money temporal? Money or currency in one country may not be valid in another country. In that situation, how it could be valid in eternal sense? Both Job 1:21 and Ecclesiastes 5:15 expound the principle that material things belong only to this world. These things do not have lasting value so irrelevant in the eternal perspective. So, contentment cannot spring from the material things.

Money could be used in such a way that the rewards are eternal. Using the wealth in such a way, that makes difference in the lives of people. Earn with temporal things the eternal rewards. This is not reward offered by airlines or retail chains. May be money given to print a tract, and through that tract one person comes to the Lord. That means the money has earned eternal rewards. This is the meaning of showing treasure in heaven. (Luke 12:34)

#### 3.3. Creating wealth Vs Creating consumerism

The Parable of Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) teaches about creating wealth. The five talented person was expected to earn and he earned five more talents; so did the person with two talents. That means they invested and created wealth. Another extreme was the one talented man did not use it up or invest but buried it. It did not do well either for him or others. Another option was to eat up the one talent – use it for selfish purposes. In a way that is the methodology of mindless consumerism.

#### 3.4. Content or discontent

Money inherently is not evil, but the attitude towards money. The Christian goal is a genuine relationship with God, our source of contentment, and a healthy detachment from material things. This gives a bonus of Great Gain. (1 Timothy 6:6) Contentment is combined with spirituality or godliness. Ungodly people cannot be content with what they have.

#### 3.5. Need or greed

There is a vast difference between need and greed. God has promised to meet our needs and not greed. Greed is insatiable desire to have more. It drove Judas one of the disciples of Lord Jesus to sell Lord Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. He loved the money and betrayed. Then he hates the money and throws it in the temple (Matt 27:3). The wealth earned by greed could become bitterness to the soul.

#### 3.6. Wealth Vs. Worth

There are some people who believe a worth of a person is determined by the wealth he or she possesses. Life does not consist of abundance of riches. (Luke 12: 15) The more the wealth, more the worth is the philosophy of the world. In malls the owners love to have people who could spend. Only those who could buy their commodities are worth of dignity or welcome.



Others could be kept out of the mall. In God's perspective the wealth does not determine the worth. In fact the woman who gave the least was worth of mention of the Saviour as was the woman who anointed Lord Jesus with expensive perfume. (Mark 12:41-44; Mark 14:3-9)

#### IV. Discipline of Giving

There was a disciple of Lord who migrated from a village to a city in India. He started a small shop for hair dressing, the only skill he had. As a God-fearing man, he will open the shop with prayer, first read the bible and then begin his work. On Sunday morning the shop will be opened only after Sunday worship service. Each day, the first income from the first customer and the tithe of whole day income would be separated and placed in a box. Each week he will take it to the church and offer it unto the Lord. Indeed, the whole family was blessed, his children became government officials.

“  
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 ”

#### 4.1. No giving:

There are many Christians who do not have the spiritual discipline or habit of giving. They have excuses like: Will my giving make any difference? The church has so much money.

#### 4.2. Reluctant Giving:

Offering time in the worship service is a hated aspect for some. They search for the least coin, which they carefully bring to offer. It is done with a sense of duty or to give an impression to others that they also give. Perhaps, Cain was reluctant to give, but gave just because Abel did. (Genesis 4:3-4)

#### 4.3. Measured giving:

Many Christians calculate and make sure they give tithe like Pharisees with a great expectation of rewards. (Luke 11:42)

#### 4.4. Planned giving:

The hairdresser in a wonderful

example, had planned a systematic way of giving. Though not much educated, he was able to create a process for his daily disciplined giving.

#### 4.5. Cheerful giving:

God loves a cheerful giver. (II Corinthians 9:6-8) This person rejoices in giving. The poor widow gave all, 2 mites (0.2 percent of a daily wage), and did not even think of keeping one for herself. Cheerful giver forgets about himself/herself, is focused on God, hence gives joyfully.

#### 4.6. Spiritual giving:

Gratefulness to God's abundant grace, unending love, marvelous gifts, most holy faith, great salvation, and promise of eternal

life with Him; is expressed in cheerful, joyful, and generous giving. That shows the spiritual maturity of a believer.

#### V. Warning against Mammon

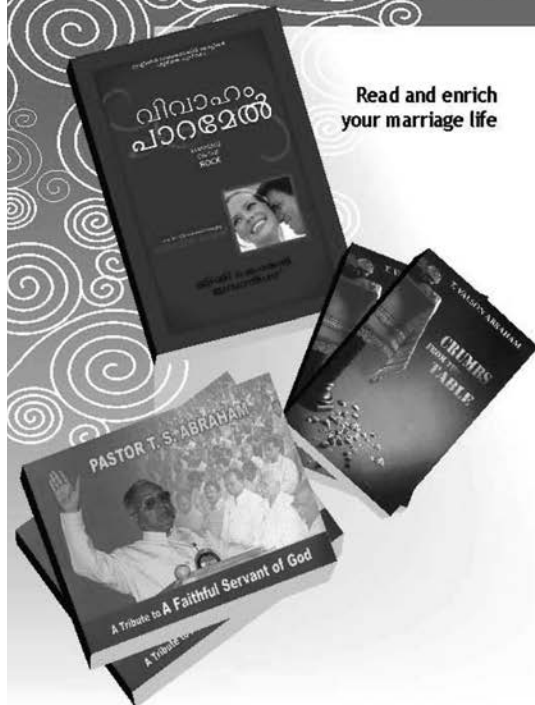
Lord Jesus Christ warned against worshipping 'mammon' - Money, Material wealth or greedy pursuit of wealth. (Matthew 6:24) Satan wants to offer an 'alternate truth' which is a lie. Satan's acceptability is impossible, if he shows his real nature. Hence, Satan personifies himself as an attractive option: 'mammon'. Made slave by mammon, a person yields all faculties, abilities, skills and opportunities to the master, who controls, dominates and dictates his life. Possession of wealth does not create a mind-set of contentment. Instead, it takes a sprint race towards more wealth, which seems to be ever within reach, put always a moving target. Paul writes that 'Godliness with contentment is Great Gain.' (I Timothy 6:6) Those who

choose 'mammon' like the rich farmer, do not know the meaning of life. (Luke 12:15,19) Those who choose to worship 'mammon' tend to be misers. They cannot stand the presence of poor, dirty and needy (Proverbs 19:17). Today, 'mammon' has been modified, adapted, morphed, magnified, portrayed, and advertised as 'god for gullible people'.

#### VI. Challenge

In the world, when people, and even governments are generous for funding destructive causes, that results in death, decay, violence, war, and destruction. Christians are called to be generous in doing good, being good, modelling good, inspiring good. Love of God transforms us to be generous for common good and for the glory of God.

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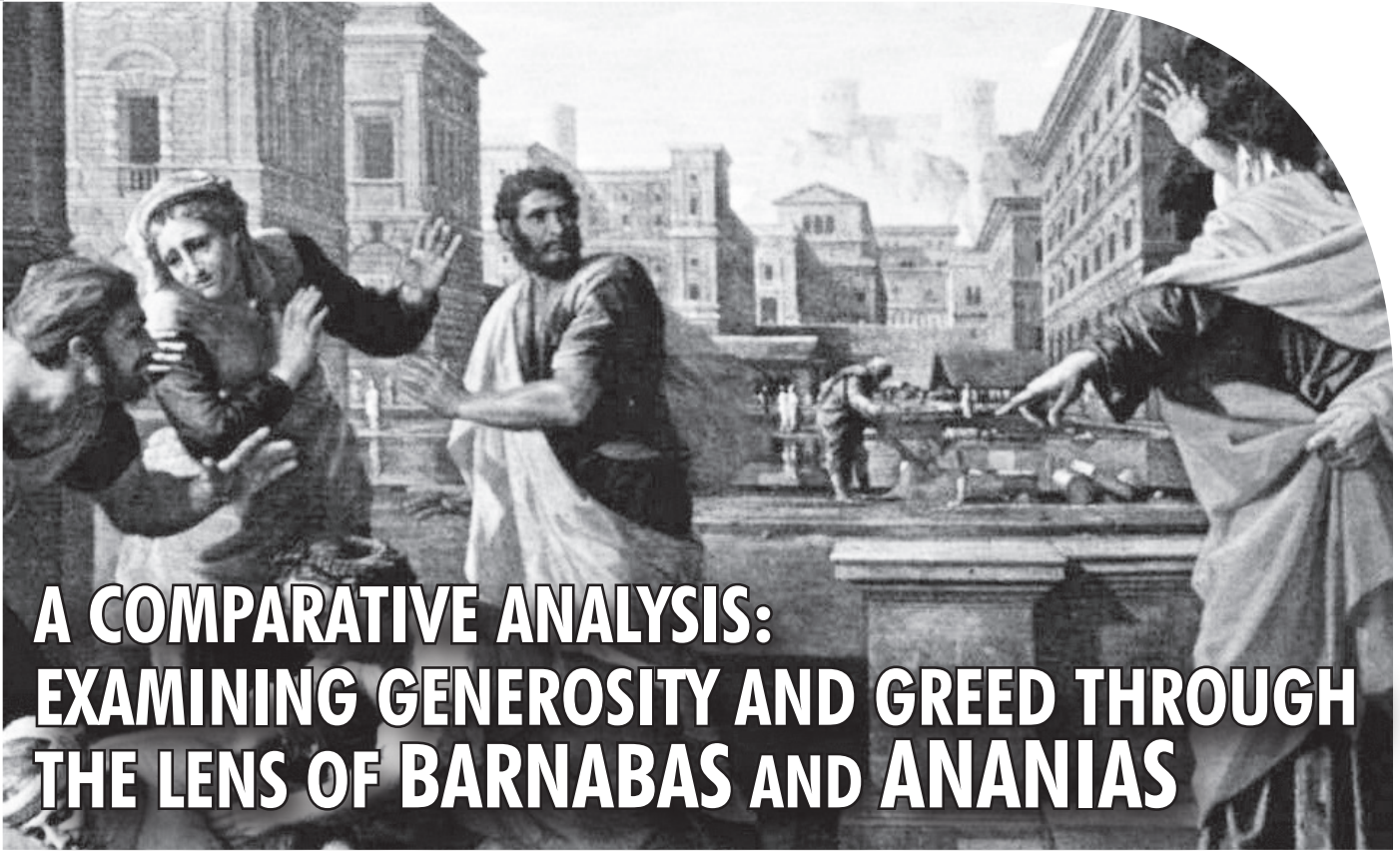
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### Crumbs From The Table

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# A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: EXAMINING GENEROSITY AND GREED THROUGH THE LENS OF BARNABAS AND ANANIAS



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**Through** the story of Barnabas, Luke skilfully illustrates the distinct generosity of the early ecclesia. Similar to this, the story of Ananias and Sapphira serves as an illustration of how greed and deceit shattered the believers' unity. These two stories run side by side (Acts.4:34-37; 5:1-11) in the context of the first-century infant ecclesia where they were enjoying their societal life of unity with 'one heart and one soul' (Acts.4:32). The Christian community identified themselves with their witnessing life of fellowship (koinonia) through devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, breaking of bread, prayers (Acts.2:42) and generously giving away their material possessions for the sake of the poor.

Most likely, the stories of Barnabas and Ananias-Sapphira served as moral examples for the young Christian church to follow when it came to sacrificially giving away their wealth and property for the benefit of the community. Luke uses these examples to illustrate the contrast between giving on the one hand and greed on the other.

The first-century Christian community in Jerusalem is probably formed in the socio-political context of imperial domination and economic depravity. Poverty was widespread among the society and there was a big divide between the rich and the poor. Debt and economic inequality were social realities of the poverty-stricken Roman Palestine. They were marginalized by the Greco-Roman political leaders as well from the Jerusalem Jewish religious leaders. By this time the Christian community was formed as a counter cultural movement by following the virtues of fellowship (koinonia) as well as love for the fellow being (philanthropia). They regularly gathered together in believers' houses and participated in the community meals (agape meals) contrasting the temple-centered dominant Jewish worship system.

The Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira stories are portrayed after giving the two summary narratives of the first-century ecclesia which exemplified the community life with utmost importance (Acts.2:42-47; 4:32-37). They had everything in common and they 'broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts' which explains their unity (Acts.4:46). Their new lifestyle is portrayed by 'for as many as owners of lands or houses' sold and brought money from the sale at the feet of the apostles. The money is being 'distributed to each as anyone having need' (Acts.4:34). The communal sharing brought favour of all the people and brought rapid growth of the ecclesia (Acts.2:47).

## **Barnabas: A Paradigm for Generosity and the Son of Encouragement**

Luke explains the contrasting nature of generosity versus greed in the society that brought blessings in the life of Barnabas and death to the lives of Ananias-Sapphira. Similar examples of greed and simultaneous judgment are in the life of Judas Iscariot (Acts.1:18,19) and Simon the sorcerer (Acts.8:9-23). Luke imparts to the young community the value of good financial stewardship through these episodes.

Barnabas was the nickname given to Joseph, the son of encouragement. He was a prominent member of the first-century Christian community. He is a Diaspora Jew from Cyprus who was renowned for his act of generosity and compassion (Acts.4:36). Later in the historical description of the missionary journeys he was named as apostle along with Paul in the context of ministry in Lystra (Acts.14:14).

In the first century context, political power was attached to wealth and

possessions, and in this milieu, Barnabas' generosity is displayed by selling a field he owned and sacrificially bringing the money to the apostle's feet (Acts.4:36-37) for the needs of the community. His action emphasizes the importance of selfless giving contrasting the benefactor system of wielding social power through making donations.

Later we see the role of Barnabas in introducing Paul to the Jerusalem apostles where the apostles were afraid to have him because of the testimony heard about the persecution made by Paul. In the early part of the spread of the gospel in and around Palestine Barnabas was sent to Antioch to investigate the reports of believers of Cyprus and Cyrene who were making a great impact among the Gentiles (Acts.11:20-24). He also brought Saul with him from Tarsus to Antioch where they were together teaching and building up the Christian ecclesia in Antioch (Acts.11:25-26). Meantime, they were sent to deliver a contribution for famine relief to the believers in Jerusalem (Acts.11:27-30).

Barnabas along with Paul was commissioned by the Gentile ecclesia in Antioch and prayerfully sent them for the missionary journey (Acts.13:1-3). In this missionary trip the local Lystran community celebrated Barnabas by calling him "Zeus" (supreme god of the ancient Greeks) after the healing of a crippled man (Acts.14:8-18). During this missionary trip, there were so many Gentiles in Asia Minor who opened their hearts to Jesus (Acts.14:27; 15:12). Later Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus and continued his missionary work (Acts.15:38-40). He was portrayed as the 'encourager', 'good man', and 'full of Holy Spirit and faith' (Acts.11:23-24).

## **Ananias and Sapphira: A Paradox of Generosity in Greed and Deception**

In contrast to the exemplary nature of generosity shown by Barnabas through giving away the riches for the sake of the poor believers in Jerusalem and a silent man behind the building up of the early Christian ecclesia, Luke, portrays the opposite nature

of greed and deceit through the family of Ananias and Sapphira. They were also members of the early Jerusalem Christian community who withheld a portion of the property in the process of selling and bringing the proceeds at the feet of the apostles (Acts.5:1-11). They must have been motivated through the generous giving of Barnabas and the spirit of communal sharing which is a hallmark of the early ecclesial community. However, they kept a portion of the proceeds for themselves while pretending the entire sale amount before the apostles. Luke portrays this story as a negative example of community life in Jerusalem.

Ananias and Sapphira carry out publicly the act of sacrificing their wealth similar to Barnabas and other wealthy Christians. However, because of greed, they offered a sacrifice that was only in part and not in whole. Moreover, Sapphira was an active participant in the whole business of selling the field but her greed, along with that of her husband, held back a certain part of the sale money. She joined with her husband in his greediness and played a game with the apostles. They agreed to deceive the apostles and the ecclesial community about the price of the field and they brought only a part of the proceeds at the feet of the apostles (Acts.5:2,3).

The contrasting nature of greed brought tragic death to the family. The conversation between Peter and Ananias explain the way they were lying to the Holy Spirit and to God resulting in their immediate death. The death of the family is interpreted as the divine punishment for their greed and deception. This tragic death cautions the first-century ecclesia by demonstrating the consequences of greed and deceit. This story also reflects the result of compromising for personal gain and popularity over the common good of others.

Because of greed, Ananias-Sapphira's heart was divided and they were not able to join with the community in 'one heart and soul.' Their sin was not selling the property but 'misappropriation' of



the money because of greed. Moreover, their greed and deception were not only to the ecclesial community but to the Holy Spirit and God. Their sin is described as Satan filling his heart with greed of keeping back some of the sale money (Acts.5:3).

The unity of the church was threatened by the actions of the husband and wife. The divine judgment of death brought 'Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (Acts.5:11).

### Generosity and Greed portrays in the Old Testament

Old Testament teaches the importance of generosity and condemns the evil nature of greed through the story of Achan (Josh.7:1-26). The greed of Achan highlights the consequences not only to him but also to the entire Israelite community. A great fear comes on all who hear of it. Achan took some of the booty set aside for sacred use. Similar to the judgment that came to Ananias

and Sapphira, divine judgment came upon Achan.

After the miraculous victory at the battle of Jericho, God commands all the spoils of the city to be dedicated to God and not taken by the Israelites. However, Achan yielded to greed and took some of the devoted items for himself hiding them in the tent (Josh.7:20-21). He had taken a beautiful Babylonian mantle, two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing five shekels and he buried under his tent. Achan's greed brought punishment not only upon himself but also upon his entire Israelite community (Josh.7:1-12). When the Israelites attempted to conquer the city of Ai they were defeated due to Achan's greed. As per the command of Joshua Achan was stoned to death and 'then the Lord turned from his fierce anger' (Josh.7:26).

Similarly, Gehazi's greed also depicts the greed in accepting money from Naman the King (2Kgs.5:20-27). Prov.11:24-25 "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes other will himself be refreshed (Prov.11:24-25).

### Generosity in the Gospels

The life and teachings of Jesus through the gospels reinforce the concepts of generosity. The generosity of Barnabas was probably the influence of Jesus' life and his teaching on the stewardship of wealth. Jesus also taught his disciples and the crowd who followed him about the dangers of greed for wealth. Jesus sets a high standard of generous giving and caring for others. He not only taught us about generosity but also modelled the way for us. His

**The greed of Achan highlights the consequences not only to him but also to the entire Israelite community. A great fear comes on all who hear of it. A great fear comes on all who hear of it. Achan took some of the booty set aside for sacred use.**

sacrificial giving motivates us to love God and care for our neighbour and the poor (Mk. 12:13-17, 41-44). Jesus taught his disciples that they must be rich toward God and not hold them in fear as slaves to mammon (Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 12:13-21; 16:1-13).

There were a group of women who provided for the ministry of Jesus and his disciples out of their means (Lk. 8:1-3). The parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21) highlights the futility of accumulating wealth for selfish purposes and emphasised the importance of being rich towards God by being generous towards earthly possessions. Jesus told to "watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk. 12:15). Jesus commands his disciples to give generously so that they will be rewarded far more abundantly.

In the story of the widows offering Jesus appreciated the generous giving of the widow (Lk. 21:1-4). He taught his disciples the radical ethic of generous giving based on trust in God and the coming of the kingdom. The widow put two copper coins into the treasury whereas the rich put their share of the great amount of money. The rich gave out of their abundance but the poor widow generously gave out of her subsistence. She fully gave herself into the hands of the Lord. It is not the amount one offers to the Lord but the generous heart of the giver.

### **The Practice of Generosity in the early church**

The first-century community life is described through the description of generous giving. Wealth and political power are interrelated in

the first-century Greco-Roman society. In this context, the early church believers gave up their wealth and generously gave to the needy so that there was no one who lacks anything.

There are two narratives that exemplified the community life of the first-century Jerusalem church (Acts. 2:42-47; 4:32-37). In this community, they shared their possession to the needs of other poor in the community (Acts. 2:42) and they were with 'one heart and soul.' The rich members of the ecclesia by selling their possession demonstrated the generous nature of God through their lives. Cornelius the centurion gave generous to the people and his prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God (Acts. 10:4).

### **The Generosity of the Macedonian Church**

The generous giving is much appreciated by Paul the Apostle and he admonishes the church to give generously and cheerfully. He encourages the Corinthian believers that generosity is equivalent to the other gifts of the Holy Spirit (speech, faith, knowledge, love; 2Cor. 8:7). He further teaches them that 'whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give..., for God loves a cheerful giver' (2Cor. 9:6-7).

The Macedonian church was an example for others in giving to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26,27).

### **The Implication of Generosity and Greed:**

The first-century infant ecclesia was highly appreciated for their exemplary life of 'one heart and one soul' but they were confronted with the temptations of greed. The story of Ananias and Sapphira reveals how greed and deception among God's people bring disrupt their koinonia/ community life. Greed and deception disrupt the communal life of the early ecclesia. Satan intruded in the lives of two early Christians and that disrupted

the unity of the community, thus spoiled the ecclesial unity.

Similar to Satan who played an important role at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus (Lk. 4:1-13) he plays a parallel role at the beginning of the period of the first-century ecclesia. The family of Ananias and Sapphira should have resisted the temptation through God's word regularly taught by the apostles. By making ourselves as the stewards of wealth and resources they should not have 'misappropriated' the price of the land and given the whole amount for the sake of the poor community.

The idea of sharing was commonly taught in first-century Greek literature but never practiced by the Greco-Roman society. But the early ecclesia at Jerusalem voluntarily practiced generosity and thus there were no needy persons among them (Acts. 4:34).

Ananias and Sapphira are filled with greed and deception whereas the first-century disciples were filled with Holy Spirit. She shared her husband's greed and deception in life and now she shares the judgement with him in death. To the disrupted social world of the Greco-Roman rich and the poor, Lukan theology states that God gives witness of his goodness through the preaching of Paul at Lystra by 'doing good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy' (Acts. 14:17).

The story line of the episode of the generosity of Barnabas and the greed and deception of Ananias and Sapphira is a mirror that reflects our attitudes and behaviours. The root cause of sin is greed for wealth/money/ the unrighteous mammon. However, the generous act reflects the nature of our creator who is the giver of life, and our master who sacrificially gave his life for all in order that we may have life in abundance. ●



# THE DECEIVING CLENCH OF GREED: UNVEILING ITS FORMATION AND INFLUENCE



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**Greed** is a part of human trait that has destroyed many relationships and many examples comes to our mind when we sit back and ponder on it. There were numerous wars and destruction upon humanity because some were clutched by the evil called greed. Greed manifests itself with the unquenchable thirst for power, wealth and relationships. Many people built their greedy life upon the sweat and blood of many lives and that stands out in every story of the tyrants. When self-interest becomes the driving force, ethical considerations are superfluous, and public officials may absorb in bribery, misappropriation, and abuse of authority. Such actions wear down public trust in institutions, leading to a breakdown of social fabric and weakening the fundamentals of fairness. The costs are far-reaching, as a society stuck in corruption struggles to achieve workable development and ensure justice for all its members. Let us look into the extensiveness of greed in this article.

## THE FORMATION OF GREED

The behaviour of greed is shaped through a series of perceptions and conclusions drawn from childhood experiences and learning. Any child is born to the world as an innocent person who has a great ability to absorb what is seen and heard. The children are like sponges who absorb a lot of lessons from the information available in the family and environment. There are families that go through a lot of emotional traumas and that results in a series of unmet needs. The child takes in a vacuum in terms of either money, power, influence or prestige and the life is designed around this unmet need and later the very requirement to fulfil and gratify this vacuum in itself becomes the motto of existence. That is the psychology behind the clutch of greed.

We find several dictators who lived in this world with a greed of power and whatever

power they have accumulated were not sufficient to fulfil the unmet need to have power more and more again. The whole life is destined to gain power over others and history is witness to that. Many dictators have a past full of unmet needs or trauma if you study them closely. Some others were taught in childhood that the meaning of existence itself is for power. They try to achieve it and this is their nature of greed. It can also be a reality when a child is deprived of power and the child believes my life is fulfilled only if I am able to exercise power over people.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO GREED

The psychology of greed discovers the complex workings of human behaviour and enthusiasm surrounding the unquenchable desire for more wealth, power, or possessions. Greed is a captivating force that drives individuals to uncompromisingly pursue personal gain, often at the expense of others. It is a multidimensional concept surrounding psychological, social, and economic factors. Greed often stems from a motivation on one's own needs and desires without considering the well-being of others. This self-centeredness can lead individuals to prioritize their own growth of resources at the expense of others. Greed can also be obsessed by a deep-seated anxiety of not having enough resources or a belief that there is a limited supply of desirable things. This fear can lead individuals to store wealth or possessions, seeking a sense of refuge and protection against future uncertainties.

Humans have a natural tendency to compare themselves to others, mostly in terms of wealth and material possessions. Greed can

form inside a person when individuals perceive that others have more than them and feel a strong desire to acquire similar or greater levels of wealth and status. One psychological phenomenon that contributes to greed is known as hedonic adaptation. It refers to the tendency of individuals to adapt to positive experiences and material possessions, leading to a diminishing sense of satisfaction over time. As a result, individuals may continually seek more wealth or possessions in an attempt to sustain or recapture the initial level of satisfaction. This is a reality in every addiction also. This principle was also found in the heretic teachings of epicureanism. Epicurus argued that pleasure is the highest good and the ultimate goal of human life. However, he defined pleasure in a wider sense, referring to it as the absence of pain and disturbances, but heading to a lot of physical indulgence. This has directed a lot of threat to the teachings of the New Testament church at that time. The pursuit of pleasure, according to Epicureans, involves seeking a state of tranquillity and satisfaction. When this becomes the motto, the greed might appear as part of fulfilling the pleasure principle at the expense of others unquenchably.

Greed can also be reinforced through positive reinforcement and reward mechanisms. When individuals experience success or gain from their greedy behaviours, such as accumulating wealth or achieving financial goals, they are more likely to continue engaging in such behaviours. One of the problems with our society is that it promotes self-centred achievements at the expense of common good. When individuals line up their own achievements and interests at the expense of the common good, it reflects a self-centred mindset or behaviour. This approach is characterized by a lack of concern for the well-being or welfare of others and a narrow focus on personal gain or success. Prioritizing self-centred accomplishments over the common good can weaken social interconnection and shared harmony. When individuals act exclusively in their own self-interest, it can lead to divisions within communities

and hinder collaboration and cooperation among people.

## THE IMPACT OF GREED

Greed habitually involves pursuing personal advantage at the expense of ethical considerations. It can lead individuals to engage in unethical behaviours such as corruption, deceitfulness, or fraud. This wear down trust, destabilizes social values, and can have harmful effects on personal truthfulness and societal well-being. The existence of each society rest upon the way people trusts each other and support each other. The communities prosper only when people see to the benefit of each other against selfishness. But it is a known truth that the societies started to perish wherever there is lack of unity and wherever selfishness and greed eat into the common good of the society. The solid foundations of unity and closeness that has worked behind the formation of strong communities are slowly wearing out today.

Greed can drive individuals or institutions to exploit or take advantage of others for personal gain. This can occur in various forms, such as labour exploitation, environmental exploitation, or financial exploitation. Such actions can lead to the suffering, oppression, or marginalization of vulnerable individuals or communities. There are millions of people living in modern term for slavery that is forced labour, forced marriage and forced sex. There are many young people who become victims of sexual greed as they were cheated with seemingly love and concern and the aggression and exploitation concealed in it. By the time they realise the greed behind the exploitation, it usually becomes too late. There are many suicides happening everyday because of these brutal victimisation and subsequent inability to cope up.

Excessive greed can contribute to economic instability. When individuals or institutions prioritize short-term gains over long-term stability, it can lead to risky financial practices, market manipulation, or speculative trades. These actions can disrupt economic systems, lead to



financial crises, and adversely affect global economies. Today the common saying is that the rich become richer everyday as poor becomes poorer. The concentration of supremacy and influence in the hands of a few individuals or companies can contribute to the widening wealth gap. Concentrated economic power permits the wealthy to exert more control over economic and political systems, possibly influencing policies in their favour.

While greed may initially provide a sense of satisfaction or achievement, it can also lead to negative psychological and emotional consequences. The persistent hunt of more can create a never-ending cycle of craving and dissatisfaction, hindering personal well-being and satisfaction. Greed can also damage individuals' relationships and lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, or unhappiness. Greed often involves a self-centred focus, where individuals become absorbed with their own wishes and ambitions. This can lead to a lack of compassion and understanding towards

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others, as their primary concern is their own personal gain. This lack of compassion can create stress in relationships and make it difficult for individuals to connect emotionally with their partners, family members, or friends. Greedy individuals may disregard or neglect the wishes, feelings, and desires of their loved ones. They may prioritize their own desires or quests, leaving little time, attention, or support for the people in their lives. This neglect can lead to feelings of bitterness, isolation, indifference and dissatisfaction in relationships. Greed often manifests as an extreme focus on material possessions and prosperity. This can lead to a shallow and money-oriented outlook on life, which can be incompatible with deeper emotional connections and shared values in relationships. It can make it challenging to build and sustain



meaningful connections based on genuine care, support, and shared experiences.

Greed also produces spiritual conflicts within individuals. This conflict arises when there is a clash between one's materialistic desires driven by greed and the principles or values that guide their spiritual or ethical beliefs. With its focus on personal gain and accumulation, greed can be at odds with spiritual or ethical principles such as compassion, generosity, contentment, and detachment from worldliness. When individuals prioritize greed over the spiritual eternal values, it creates an inner conflict and a sense of spiritual dissatisfaction. Greed can lead individuals to engage in unethical behaviour or make morally questionable decisions to fulfil their desires for wealth or possessions against their spiritual convictions. This can create internal turmoil as they wrestle with the battle between their greed-driven actions and their

moral or spiritual standards and beliefs. This can lead to a sense of emptiness, a loss of meaning, and a disconnection from one's purpose or higher values of life as taught in the scripture. Despite the hunt of wealth and possessions driven by greed, individuals may find that they are never accurately satisfied or fulfilled. This inner dissatisfaction can effect from a spiritual conflict between the pursuit of material wealth and the realization that true happiness and contentment lie in non-material aspects of life, such as relationship with God, personal growth, community living, and spiritual well-being.

### OVERCOMING GREED

The first step in overcoming greed is to develop self-awareness and recognize the presence of greed within oneself. There must be acceptance of the negative consequences of greed that has resulted in relationship issues, personal dissatisfaction, spiritual conflicts etc. There must be reflections on selfish desires, motivations, and behaviours to understand how greed manifests in life. The change starts from contemplating upon attention to the thoughts, emotions, and actions associated with greed. The work of the Holy Spirit is

a great key factor in the whole procedure. The person must wait upon the Lord and be willing to listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. The vision of eternity that alleviated greed from the heart of Jacob must be allowed to work in each of us.

Practicing thankfulness and satisfaction can help shift the focus away from accumulating material possessions and towards appreciating and being satisfied with what we currently have. Regularly let us take time to acknowledge and be grateful for the blessings in our life. Practice placing oneself in the shoes of others and seeking to understand their needs and viewpoints. Enthusiastically engage in acts of compassion and generosity towards others, whether through volunteering, helping those in need, or supporting charitable causes. This can help to get away from self-centred tendencies. Let us also engage in activities that nurture personal development in spirituality, enhance connections with loved ones, and contribute to the well-being of others. Devote your time, energy, and resources in experiences that align with your spiritual values and bring a sense of purpose.

God bless you! ●

# SACRIFICIAL GIVING



## **DR. CHRIS PHILIP MATHEW**

Dr. Chris Philip Mathew is Associate Professor in Internal Medicine. He is a student of the Bible, and loves teaching the Bible, Systematic Theology and Christian History.

**The** lives of Barnabas and Ananias teaches us about actions and repercussions within the Christian community. In Acts 4:32-5:14 we see a brand new kind of living – one where people sold their lands and houses to help poorer Christians. This was not a Government-mandated. It was the result of changed hearts leading to lifestyle changes.

Acts 4:32-34 reads *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed were his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, they distributed to each as any had need."*

Now remember that when the Bible uses the term all with regards to humans doing something, all doesn't necessarily mean every single human being in the world, and even when reduced through specification to a single Christian community as we see in this passage, "all" doesn't necessarily mean every single human in that community. We see this repeatedly throughout Scripture. This is largely because humans are not robots and because humans are... very humanly inconsistent. We are not robots that make decisions based solely on facts, not merely because very often we do not have all the facts in front of us, but also because extraneous factors—the circumstances surrounding a particular event, the social or political blowback to our decisions, our own personal developmental goliaths, and many other factors affect our decision-making process. So even when the Bible refers to all humans being a certain way or all humans doing a certain thing, we have to recognize that this all is often a

generalization used to describe the pervasiveness of a particular idea about humans. However, when God does something for all humans, we can very well believe that all means all simply because God is truthful, God is reliable, God is consistent. He has all the facts in front of Him, He is not beholden to anyone. He is above all circumstances. He is not trying to impress anyone. He is not making decisions in fear of anyone. He is God.

Coming back to our passage, we see that the multitude who believed were of one heart and one soul. Observe what they did. They lived like their possessions belonged to their Christian brothers and sisters. Who were the ones who could sell their lands and houses? Those who had more than one parcel of land or more than one house. If you're wondering whether people lived on rent during Jesus's time, then Yes, many people did live on rent. However, like today, the gold standard of wealth was to have your own house. The passage does not mean that people made themselves homeless and landless to give to their Christian brothers and sisters though I wouldn't be surprised if any did do just that. It was completely voluntary and the first example we see of this is that of Barnabas who sold a parcel of land and placed the money at the apostles' feet.

This action is actually the first time that an Old Testament promise is expounded as being put into practice in the Bible. In Dt 15:4-11, God promises that there will be no poor among the Israelites if they live like how God had instructed them to live. However, knowing that the Israelites would not consistently follow his laws, God says in verse 11 that the poor would always be in the land. In the New Testament even though there

no longer was a 50-year Jubilee to cancel debts, by living out Proverbs 19:17, and with giving to the poor being equated with lending to the Lord, those who believed in Jesus Christ were living out the spirit of the Old Testament law without the shackles of it being a requirement. This is similar to companies in India helping communities in India before 2013. They had done it out of an intrinsic desire to help the local communities. However, from 2013, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) was enacted in India and whether or not companies wanted to, they were mandated to help local communities. Notice that when there is a transformation in the hearts of people, helping each other comes naturally. When people don't help each other, this 'help' needs to be mandated.

What was the result of all this selfless sacrificial love and giving? Acts 4:33 - many came to know of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the people who witnessed about Jesus were blessed with great favour from God. This then is the kernel of Christianity - to know that I am saved because Jesus loved me so selflessly and sacrificially that He died in my place for the forgiveness of my sins, that He physically rose again on the 3rd day, and is now my Advocate representing me in the court of God our Father. We become like the Person we worship. By trusting this selfless Jesus alone, can we however feebly even hope to exemplify His life of sacrificial giving and selflessness.

The problem arises when we think that we can fool God's anointed leaders and the church. This is what a couple decide to do in Acts 5:1-11. Ananias and Sapphira sell a plot of land and colluding with each other, decide to keep back a portion of it, while acting like they gave everything to the church. I had often assumed that the apostles were at Ananias's and Sapphira's home when the events of their deaths happened because it seemed that Sapphira's coming back in at Acts 5:7 suggested that she was coming back home. However, as I thought about it, I wondered why would the apostles be

spending their time at the home of Ananias. Verse 12 informs us that the apostles were at Solomon's portico which was built along the entrance to the Jerusalem temple just along the outer border of the Outer Court of the Temple. A portico is an unwallled, roofed walkway with pillars along the sides to hold up the roof. It was 606ft long x 23ft wide x 40ft high. This means that Solomon's Portico alone would have occupied 32 cents of land. This is most likely where Barnabas and Ananias gave their proceeds to the apostles.

Now notice what Peter tells Ananias in Acts 5. Firstly, no one was obligated to sell their land, and secondly, even after the land was sold, no one was obligated to give the proceeds to the church. Besides this, lying to the church was equated with Ananias having lied to the Holy Spirit. Notice that the emphasis here is not on the money, but on lying to God by lying to the church. We see here a powerful example of Jesus in His role as judge. Since the church is the body of Christ on earth today, lying to the church is equated with lying to Jesus. This is the same as putting God to the test. Testing God's patience, angering God is not something we as Christians should do. Some of us may think in our hearts - I can sin now and ask God for forgiveness later because God is a merciful God. This however, is what it means to put God to the test, to test God's patience, to anger God. We should not assume to take God's mercy for granted. Let us rather as children of God strive to utilise the grace of God, the strength of God in us, the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin. God has given us the Holy Spirit and as Christians we have the power to overcome sin. We must not succumb to sin, we must not justify it. Rather we must live lives of holiness giving honour and glory to God. We must not think that our God is a gracious God, so we can live unholy lives now and play with God's mercy. Judgement awaits each of us - some of us will be judged faithful. My plea is that we all be able to live lives of selflessness and sacrificial love with Jesus Christ as our paragon. ●



# GUJARAT BIBLE TRAINING CENTRE GRADUATION SERVICE

26th June 2023



Procession



Pr. Johnson Mark, Principal  
Welcomes the Guests



Welcoming of Chief Guest, Dr. Jose L.,  
Academic Dean, India Bible College and Seminary



Convocation message: Dr. L. Jose, Translation by Pr. Suresh S



Worship team leads the congregation in singing



Presenting Graduates : Pr. Binumon B.



Report: Pr. Reji Abraham



Prayer for Graduates : Pr. P.A George



Scripture Recitation



← Awarding certificates : Dr. Jose L. →



Pr. Sabu Thomas praying for New Batch 2023-24



Sabu Joseph Graduate Speaker



Vote of thanks by Pr. Shijo K Joseph



C.Th. Graduates



Dip.Th. Students

