A Generous Gift

Teaching Tips

December 27, 2015

Bible Study Guide 4

Words You Should Know

A. Exalt (Matthew 23:12) hupsoo (Gk.)—To raise on high, lift up.

B. Humble (v. 12) tapeinoo (Gk.)—To bring or make low.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Giving from the Heart. We all desire to be recognized and held in high esteem by others. Will the adulation of others confirm our real importance? While Jesus denounced the scribes’ and Pharisees’ obsession with receiving recognition, He affirmed the acts of selfless compassion and humility by the poor widow, who gave all she had.

A. Pray for understanding and wisdom.

B. Read Matthew 23:2–12 and Mark 12:38–44.

C. Complete Lesson 4 in the Precepts For Living® Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Read the Aim for Change as a class.

B. Read the Unifying Principle and Keep in Mind verse to the class.

C. Ask for a volunteer to read the In Focus story to the class.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read the Focal Verses.

B. Read The People, Places, and Times; Background; In Depth; and Search the Scriptures sections to clarify verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Answer the questions in the Discuss the Meaning section.

B. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the Lesson in Our Society section.

N—Next Steps for Application
A. Read the Make It Happen section and discuss how to apply it to your life.

B. Pray and thank God for His generous gifts to us.

**Worship Guide**

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: A Generous Gift

Song: “You Can't Beat God Giving”

Devotional Reading: John 1:10–18

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**Teaching God's Word**

Bible Background • **MATTHEW 23:2–12; MARK 12:38–44**

Printed Text • **MATTHEW 23:2–12; MARK 12:38–44** | Devotional Reading • **JOHN 1:10–18**

**Aim for Change**

By the end of the lesson, we will: OBSERVE the contrast that Jesus made between the arrogance of the religious leaders and the piety of the humble, poor woman; REFLECT on the tension between wanting recognition and selfless giving that often receives no recognition; and RESOLVE to become more selfless in giving.

**In Focus**

The pastor’s anniversary was in full swing. The men wore their best suits and the church mothers had on their most elaborate hats. Many pastors from all over the city had come to pay their respects to Rev. Goodlow. They brought their choirs to support them, which sang so well it almost seemed like a competition. Later in the service, the offering was about to be taken up. The congregation marched around the pews in their fine attire to drop their offering in the collection plate. Soon after, the different leaders of the church auxiliaries presented their love offerings to the pastor. The mothers board tried to outdo the deacons. The deacons tried to outdo the Sunday School. The ushers tried to outdo the men’s department. They all announced the amount of money they collected, boasting in their accomplishments and not out of love for the pastor or God. With all the proceedings going on, no one noticed the unmarked envelope Sister Smith placed in the collection plate. It contained the money from the insurance settlement after her husband’s death. The money could have afforded her some really nice luxuries and some much needed home repairs, but she decided to give it to the church and support Rev. Goodlow, who had not only been a good pastor but a loyal friend to her and her family.

*Selfless giving is what counts with God. What are some misguided reasons that motivate people to give to God?*

**Keep in Mind**

“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).
Focal Verses

KJV
Matthew 23:2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat:

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Mark 12:38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,

39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts:

40 Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

NLT
Matthew 23:2 “The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are the official interpreters of the law of Moses.

3 So practice and obey whatever they tell you, but don't follow their example. For they don't practice what they teach.

4 They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.
5 Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels.

6 And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues.

7 They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi.’

8 Don’t let anyone call you ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters.

9 And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father.

10 And don’t let anyone call you ‘Teacher,’ for you have only one teacher, the Messiah.

11 The greatest among you must be a servant.

12 But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Mark 12:38 Jesus also taught: “Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces.

39 And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets.

40 Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished.”

41 Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts.

42 Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins.

43 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions.

44 For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.”

The People, Places, and Times

Pharisees. A very influential religious group of Jewish men that existed in Judea from second century BC through the first century AD. The word Pharisee is ultimately from a word meaning “separated ones” or “set apart” in Hebrew. The group was comprised of laymen who adhered to strict observance of the Sabbath, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish traditions. They also believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Scribes. One of several groups in first-century Judaism. The scribes were trained in writing and were very influential as interpreters and teachers of the Law. They also acted as agents of the Roman Empire and the local rulers, preparing legal documents and recording deeds. They could belong to other groups, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees (e.g., “the scribes of the Pharisees” in Mark 2:16; Acts 23:9, ESV).

Widows. The Torah contains several injunctions regarding the care for widows to protect them from being taken advantage of because they have lost their husbands. For instance, Exodus 22:22 states: “You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.” According to the rabbinical tradition, a widow is disallowed from inheriting her husband’s estate. However, she is entitled to receive a settlement on the estate from which she can maintain her livelihood if and when she remarries.

Background
After Jesus makes His entry into Jerusalem and is exalted by the people who shouted hosannas in celebration of the Messiah’s coming (Matthew 21:1–11), He enters the temple, the center of Jewish religious and political activity. On seeing this, Jesus cleanses the temple of exploitative merchant activity (Matthew 21:12–17). Jesus then turns His attention to the religious leaders, observing the religious leaders and teachers’ abusive practices (Matthew 21:23–23:36). He then begins to instruct His disciples and the crowd of people on the ways of the kingdom of God that are in stark contrast to the personal practices of the Pharisees and scribes.

At-A-Glance

1. Lack of Humility (Matthew 23:2–7)
2. Instruction in Humility (vv. 8–12)
3. Example of Humility (Mark 12:38–44)

In Depth

1. Lack of Humility (Matthew 23:2–7)

Jesus reveals the Pharisees’ and scribes’ hypocritical behavior to the crowds and His disciples. To begin with, Jesus encourages the role of the scribes and Pharisees and applauds them for taking on the important task of interpreting and teaching the Torah (or Law) (v. 3). Jesus does not deny the Torah and the importance of the Pharisees’ and scribes’ role, yet He denounces their hypocritical actions toward their responsibilities. The scribes and Pharisees are making a mockery of the Law by pursuing their own self-interests at the expense of the community. They are abusing their authority as teachers and community leaders, stepping over others to raise themselves up. They are more concerned with appearing as privileged figures (reflected in the clothes they wear and their sitting in the best seats in the synagogue), than loving their neighbor as themselves.

2. Instruction in Humility (vv. 8–12)

Jesus’ disciples should not desire to be exalted by the people because of their leadership position in the church. Instead, Jesus demands His disciples practice servanthood when He says, “he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (v. 11). A person’s actions will cause others to lift that person up. So, to follow the instructions of the kingdom, the disciples must do the opposite of the prevailing practice. Jesus says, “And those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (v. 12, NLT).

3. Example of Humility (Mark 12:38–44)

The temple establishment was supposed to provide social protection and economic assistance to widows (Deuteronomy 14:29, 26:12–13); instead, under the scribes’ leadership, it had become an institution of oppression. Nevertheless, the widow’s offering is an example of an act of humility and generous giving, in spite of her hardship. This act is not depicted in the Matthean version of the story. In Matthew, Jesus simply explains to His disciples the role of humility in servanthood. In Mark, the widow’s act serves as an example of the humility elaborated on in Matthew by illustrating the role of humility and the act of servanthood. By contrast, those who insist on self-promoting their importance will receive condemnation in the last days.

Search the Scriptures

1. What did Jesus mean when He said, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:11)?

2. Why did Jesus say that those who delight in flaunting their importance receive the greatest condemnation (Mark 12:40)?
Discuss the Meaning

The Pharisees and scribes were charged to serve the people and maintain a just society. Part of this included giving to the temple. However, their giving was not genuine but self-serving. What does genuine generosity entail? What does genuine servanthood entail?

Lesson in Our Society

Christians of every circumstance, especially those in leadership positions, tend to yearn for recognition. Everyone wants a title, but not everyone wants to be called a servant. American society, in fact, is established on the basis of privilege and non-privilege. Only by radical departure from the world’s values and priorities will Christians be the disciples of the one Teacher and Lord. Only by practicing explicitly selfless acts of humility will Christians be exalted.

Make It Happen

Who are you trusting in for your advancement? Who are you trusting with your reputation? This week, seek to serve others who would be considered lower than you. Offer to serve one of your subordinates at work. Give to a person or organization without them knowing it was you. In this way, you will be seeking to be admired by Jesus and not others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

Matthew 23:1–12; Mark 12:38–44

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Many times in the Gospel, Jesus speaks not only to His core group of twelve disciples but also to the multitudes. In this instance, He speaks concerning the practices of the scribes and Pharisees in relation to their status in the kingdom of God. The scribe (Gk. *grammateus*, *gram-mah-TUSE*) was an expert interpreter and teacher of the Mosaic Law, usually called on to answer difficult questions for the local courts and the Sanhedrin council. Jesus affirms that they sit in Moses’ seat (v. 2). Although many scholars argue that this was an actual seat in the synagogue used to make authoritative decisions and explanations by the law of Moses, there is no evidence of this; instead, Jesus affirms their authority in interpreting the Law. He says that whatever they tell the people to observe, they should observe (Gk. *tereo*, *teh-REH-oh*); this word means to guard or keep watch. In this context, it means to attend to carefully or take care of; by implication, it means to listen and obey. Jesus says to attend to what they say and do it, but not copy what they do, because “they say and do not.”

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

Jesus makes a general statement describing their actions and the way they have twisted the Jewish faith. He describes the burdens (Gk. *phortion*, *for-TEE-on*) of the scribes and Pharisees. These burdens were metaphorically the religious rituals, which the religious leaders derived from the Mosaic Law. They are described as being heavy (Gk.
barus, bah-ROOS), which means weighty and in this context severe and stern. They lay these burdens on other men’s shoulders while they do not lift a finger. The shoulders carry weight for the body, which emphasize their strength. The finger is one of the weakest parts of the body. In other words, the Pharisees put people under a life-consuming burden and will not make the smallest effort to help people please God.

Jesus also comments on their motives. All their religion is for the applause of others, as seen in their showing off their phylacteries (Gk. phulakterion, foo-lak-TAY-ree-on), small cases filled with strips of paper on which were written specific passages from the Torah (Exodus 13:11–16; Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:16–21). The word for phylactery was first used for a fortified place stationed with a garrison. The word could also more generally mean a preservative or safeguard, which is related to the meaning here, as observant Jews believed the phylacteries could ward off evil spirits and demons. These small cases were worn on the forehead and the left arm against the heart to remind them of their obligation to keep the Mosaic Law in their head and heart (Deuteronomy 6:8, 11:18). Instead of serving this purpose, the Pharisees used them to broadcast their religious devotion to others. In addition, they “enlarged the borders of their garments.” The borders (Gk. kraspedon, KRAHS-pee-don) of their garments were the traditional blue and white tassels worn on the edge of their mantles or cloaks (Numbers 15:38–41). These also were used to remind the Jews of keeping God’s commandments. The Pharisees and scribes elongated these in order to appear more religious.

6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

Jesus goes further to point out their selfishness and hypocrisy. The Pharisees loved the uppermost rooms (Gk. protoklisia, pro-toh-klee-SEE-ah) at feasts—not actual rooms, as the King James Version translates, but the first seat or reclining place at the table. Although there is information on the Greek, Persian, and Roman seating arrangements of the time, it is not known what particular seat this was for Jews. Ancient evidence contains people’s complaints against being seated in low status positions. In another place, Jesus would explain the proper way to handle seating arrangements (Luke 14:1–11). For now, He rebukes the Pharisees and scribes for their desire of the first place.

Jesus also says the Pharisees and scribes love the chief seats (Gk. protokathedria, pro-toh-ka-thed-REE-ah) in the synagogues. Although a simple translation of the word is the “first seat,” the seating arrangements in synagogues during the first century varied, so it is hard to pinpoint exactly where this seat would be placed. We can estimate that this seat must have been closest to the bema, a precursor of the pulpit, where the Scriptures would be read. There is also the possibility that more honorable guests would have been given chairs while others sat on mats. Both the synagogue and the banquet were public gatherings that presented an opportunity for the religious leaders to call attention to their spiritual importance.

7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

Greetings in the first century were a very important social component, containing rules on how to address peers, inferiors, and superiors. To not greet a teacher of the Law was a serious offense. Another sign of the Pharisees’ self-seeking was their desire to be called Rabbi (Gk. rhabbi, rah-BEE), meaning “great one.” By implication, it also means “master” or “my lord.” It was the custom of Jews to refer to their teachers this way, even when not in their presence.

Jesus condemns this practice. He says not to call anyone Rabbi or “great one.” There is only one great one—Christ. He continues to proclaim all His followers as “brethren,” family and peers not adherent to a hierarchy.

Pupils often called their rabbis father (Gk. pater, pah-TARE). While Jesus uses the formal designation of father, which in a Jewish context was also used for God, pupils were known to address their rabbis as “Abba” (Aramaic for “our dear father”) a way to address them with respect and also signify the type of relationship between student and teacher. The rabbis in turn addressed their pupils as children. Jesus says this is not how it works in the kingdom of
God; there is only one Father, God Himself. He also says there is only one Master (Gk. kathegetes, ka-they-gay-TACE), which means guide or teacher.

11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Jesus outlines a different path to greatness and significance. He says whoever is the greatest (Gk. meizon, MADE-zone) or has the highest rank and status must become a servant (Gk. diakonos, dee-AH-ko-noce). This word means an attendant or waiter, and one who executes another’s commands. This is different from the common word for slave (Gk. doulos, DOO-loce) in the New Testament; diakonos emphasizes the activity of the worker, whereas doulos denotes the relation between the one serving and the one being served. Jesus further adds that those who exalt (Gk. hupsoo, hoop-SOH-oh) or lift themselves high will be abased, or brought low and humiliated. The reverse also holds true; those who humble themselves will be exalted. The same Greek verb for humbles is used for abased (tapeinoo, tah-pay-NOH-oh). The KJV is trying to convey that the verb appears in both the active and the passive voices here. In other words, if you try to make yourself lower (humble yourself), you will be raised up, but if you try to lift yourself up, you will be made lower (abased). The NLT nicely captures Jesus’ contrast of the two types of people by translating His words literally.

Mark 12:38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, 39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: 40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Here, Jesus gives a warning is issued to the disciples concerning the scribes and how they appear spiritual but are not. The long clothing (Gk. stole, STO-lay) were robes that identified them as religious leaders and was similar to the linen robes of priests. Their prayers were for pretense (Gk. prophasis, PRAH-fa-sis) or an excuse covering up the real reason for their actions which was the praise of others. Instead of displaying generosity, like the widow introduced later in the narrative, they prey on the resources of widows.

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. 42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

Jesus sits across from the treasury (Gk. gazophulakion, god-zo-foo-LA-kee-on). This is a word used for the different rooms in the temple, which contained money, public records, and the property of widows and orphans. It is reported in Jewish tradition after the first century that there were ten vessels shaped like trumpets to collect voluntary offerings as well as tax money. The treasury was located in the temple’s Court of Women. This would make it accessible to all Israelites no matter what gender. Jesus watches people give their offerings and sees the rich giving much, but a poor widow stands out from the crowd. She throws in two mites (Gk. lepton, lep-TAHN), which were the smallest and lightest coins. Together two of them made up a farthing (Gk. kodrantes, kod-RAHN-tays), which was only worth 3/8 of a cent.

43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: 44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

The action of the widow prompts Jesus to call His disciples to a true example of greatness in contrast to the Pharisees, scribes, and all the rich people who gave their offerings. They all gave an offering from their abundance (Gk. perisseuo, peh-rees-SUE-oh), meaning the overflow or what was left over. They gave what they could afford to give. The widow, on the other hand, gave of her want (Gk. husteresis, hus-TEH-ray-sis) or what is lacking. She gave all of her living (Gk. bios, BEE-ose), the general word for life and by extension the resources, goods, and wealth by which life is sustained. Jesus praises the widow for her absolute trust in God, as opposed to the Pharisees and
scribes along with the rich worshipers who trust in themselves.

Say It Correctly

Phylacteries. fi-LAK-tuh-rees
Synagogue. SIH-nuh-gog.

Daily Bible Readings

**MONDAY**

Modeled Generosity
(John 1:10–18)

**TUESDAY**

Gracious Generosity
(Ephesians 2:1–10)

**WEDNESDAY**

Excellent Generosity
(2 Corinthians 8:3–9)

**THURSDAY**

Wise Generosity
(Colossians 3:12–17)

**FRIDAY**

Loving Generosity
(Romans 12:6–13)

**SATURDAY**

Humble Generosity
(Matthew 6:1–6)

**SUNDAY**

A Generous Gift
(Matthew 23:2–12; Mark 12:38–44)