

Monday, November 6. Read Psalm 112:1-9. This psalm said that to “honor the Lord” means being caring, merciful and justice seeking people, freely giving of ourselves. Fear is one obstacle that can block us from being generous and compassionate. Those who honor the Lord, however, “won’t be frightened at bad news. Their hearts are steady, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are firm; they aren’t afraid.” What a privilege to live free from fear’s debilitating effects! We have the testimony of millions of people who’ve served God through the centuries, and who testify that that kind of life is a gift. As you accept God’s love, and reflect that love by serving others, your life takes on purpose and meaning. You find fulfillment, one of God’s “present tense” blessings. When have you had the joy of sensing God blessing someone else through you? The psalmist used a striking metaphor for people who live God’s way: “They shine in the dark” (verse 4). Jesus told his followers, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). When have you seen God shining through you to bring the light of hope to someone else’s darkness? When has another Christian’s “light” brightened your life?

Tuesday, November 7. Read Ecclesiastes 5:8-20. The writer of Ecclesiastes had observed human life closely and carefully. Verse 10 noted the painful irony that “the money lover isn’t satisfied with money.” Verses 15-16 stated more poetically the same truth as the more prosaic English phrase “you can’t take it with you.” Perhaps most important, true joy and satisfaction in life come as God’s gift to us (verses 19-20). Ecclesiastes observed pointedly that “the excess of the wealthy won’t let them sleep . . . people hoard their wealth to their own detriment” (verses 12-13). Have you ever had a sense that something you owned (or wanted to own) was taking over your life? What has helped you to avoid being owned by the things you own? True wisdom helps us accept our limits, and especially our mortality (which our society tries so hard to deny). The Message rendered verse 20 as “God deals out joy in the present, the now. It’s useless to brood over how long we might live.” In what ways have you learned to find God’s joy in the now? What are some ways you thank God for the good in your life, free from fear of the future or envy of what others seem to have?

Wednesday, November 8. Read Matthew 19:16-30. Jesus called this young man to be brave enough to reset his priorities. He wasn’t able to do it. He went away sad, which suggests that he wanted to follow Jesus. He didn’t do it, which showed that he wanted his earthly possessions even more. Like many people then (and now), Jesus’ disciples thought earthy riches always showed God’s approval of a person. When Jesus said, “It will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven,” he shocked them. Very hard, but not impossible: “All things are possible for God” (verse 26). This story poses a question many of us would rather not wrestle with: “Which of my possessions, if any, are so precious to me that, if I had to, I’d choose them over Jesus?” But courageously wrestling through that question can set you free! How will you strengthen your trust in God, and let God guide you in accurately valuing God’s gift of eternal life, and faithfully using your earthly possessions for God’s purposes? Many affluent people in the Bible (e.g. Abraham in the Old Testament, Lydia the seller of royal purple cloth in the New Testament—see Acts 16) were NOT told to sell all they had. What do you believe was the heart issue Jesus knew the young man needed to address? What was the central obstacle that kept him from responding to Jesus’ call?

Thursday, November 9. Read Luke 12:13-21. Jesus stated a basic principle of his kingdom in verse 15: “One’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions.” He followed up with a parable. It was a simple story – a rich man, reaping a large crop, thought of nothing but how to keep it all, adding it to his already overflowing supply. Absorbed with earthly wealth, he forgot that, when life ended, none of it would be of any use to him. Jesus knew better, and urged his hearers to become “rich toward God.” Imagine that the well-to-do farmer in this parable (or someone like him today) said to you, “My life seems kind of hollow and empty, in spite of all of the wealth I’ve built up. I’d like to find greater fulfillment—what do you think I should do?” How would you answer—what might that person do to become “rich toward God”? In what ways are you seeking to build that kind of eternal wealth? One option never seemed to occur to the man in Jesus’ story. He never said anything like, “I’ve got more than enough. I think I’ll give some of it away.” How easy or hard is it for you to be generous with the money, time or other “stuff” you have? What experiences or examples have helped you find the freedom of living more generously?

Friday, November 10. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Paul, a traveling Christian preacher who owned, as far as we know, no real estate, no life insurance and no retirement plan, wrote those words! That does not mean it is wrong to have things like that. It does challenge us to rethink how we define “rich” and “more than enough.” God’s wisdom truly opens our hearts to new kinds of freedom and satisfaction! Paul did not invent the idea that God’s people should give freely, without pressure. In Exodus 25:2, the command about offerings to build a tabernacle in the desert was “Receive my gift offerings from everyone who freely wants to give.” What reasons would God have for wanting us to give from free, grateful hearts without coercion or pressure? When have you felt the joy of giving freely from a grateful heart of love? Since today is Friday, you’re not likely to be in a setting where someone will pass an offering plate. In what ways can you find or create an opportunity to show a generous spirit on today? What is one thing you can identify that shows God’s great generosity toward you? How can focusing on God’s generosity to you help you be more cheerfully generous toward others?