

Based on my research of the gospel passage I can confidently say that there are basically only four possible lessons that Jesus might want us to learn from the poor widow. After we've heard the four possible lessons, each of us can decide for ourselves which of the four possible lessons is correct.

The first possible lesson that Jesus might want us to learn from the poor widow is this:

“The TRUE gift is to give EVERYTHING one has.”

The second possible lesson is this:

“It's not the AMOUNT of the gift that matters; what matters is the SPIRIT and MOTIVES of the giver.”

The third possible lesson is this:

“All people should give according to their means.”

The fourth and final possible lesson that Jesus might want us to learn from the widow is this:

The TRUE measure of stewardship is NOT how much we GIVE to God;
the TRUE measure of stewardship is how much we KEEP for ourselves.

With those four possible lessons in mind, please think back or look back at the reading, Mark 12:38-44. Which of the four possible lessons did you hear?

When we examine our passage we discover that we can easily rule out two of the four possible lessons. In this passage, we can rule out the possible lesson that, “All people should give according to their means.”

We can rule that out as a lesson of this passage because the poor widow clearly did NOT give according to her means. The widow gave WAY BEYOND her means; she gave ALL she had!

In this passage, we can also rule out the possible lesson that, “It’s not the AMOUNT of the gift that matters; what matters is the SPIRIT and MOTIVES of the giver.”

We can rule that out as a lesson of this passage because the passage says absolutely nothing about the SPIRIT or MOTIVES of the poor widow. We do not know her SPIRIT or MOTIVES because the text does not mention them.

Please understand, the two lessons that we just ruled out actually ARE Biblical Stewardship Principles. Listen to 2 Corinthians 8.12. Paul writes these words, “For if the WILLINGNESS is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”

2 Corinthians 8.12 DOES teach that “It’s not the AMOUNT of the gift that matters; what matters is the SPIRIT and MOTIVES of the giver.”

And 2 Corinthians 8.12 DOES teach that “All people should give according to their means. Both of those points ARE true Biblical Stewardship Principles.

However, to understand what Jesus wants us to learn from the widow, we need to recognize that neither of those two Principles is taught in today’s passage.

When it comes to possible lessons that Jesus wants us to learn from the widow, there are only two remaining possibilities. The two possible lessons Jesus wants us to learn from the widow... are:

Number One, “The TRUE measure of stewardship is NOT how much we GIVE to God; the TRUE measure of stewardship is how much we KEEP for ourselves.

OR... number two, “The TRUE gift is to give EVERYTHING one has.”

In the New Testament, Jesus commands only one person to give away ALL of his possessions. That one person was, “The Rich, Young Ruler.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us about him. We talked about, “The Rich, Young Ruler,” Jesus commanded that particular man to sell all his possessions, because the possessions of that man were preventing him from FOLLOWING JESUS.

Jesus did have several wealthy followers... and Jesus did NOT command any of those wealthy people to sell all their possessions.

This means that if YOUR and MY possessions are not preventing us from FOLLOWING JESUS, then Jesus probably will not call US to sell all of OUR possessions.

There is another important reason why I am convinced that the lesson of today’s passage is not, “The TRUE gift is to give EVERYTHING one has.”

When we consider the context of the story of the poor widow, it seems completely clear that Jesus is doing two very different things: First, Jesus praises the SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY of the poor widow... and second, Jesus laments... and is disgusted by a corrupt religious system that would encourage a poor woman to put in her last two coins.

Here’s why I say that Jesus was disgusted by a corrupt religious system that would encourage a poor woman to put in her last two coins. The story of this poor widow is recorded twice, once in Mark... and once in Luke. And in both Mark and Luke, immediately before the account of the poor widow, Jesus condemns the Scribes for devouring widows’ houses.

Beginning in Mark 12.38, Jesus says,

“Watch out for the teachers of the law [the Scribes]...
They devour widows’ houses
and for a show make lengthy prayers.
Such men will be punished most severely.”

Immediately after Jesus said those words, He saw the poor widow come and contribute her last two coins. When we read the story in context, the poor widow seems to be a tragic example of a widow who has had her house DEVoured by corrupt Scribes!

Do you see what that means? It means that you and I do not need to empty our bank accounts to please God!

At the beginning of this sermon, I said that after my own prayerful study and after reading other commentators, I am convinced that there are only four possible lessons that Jesus wants you and me to learn from the poor widow.

We have carefully ruled out three of those four possible lessons. Here, my friends, is the lesson that I believe Jesus wants us to learn from the poor widow:

“The TRUE measure of stewardship is NOT how much we GIVE to God; the TRUE measure of stewardship is how much we KEEP for ourselves!” In other words, God looks at what our giving actually COSTS us; God looks at the SACRIFICES we make for His Kingdom.

Let’s consider the SACRIFICE made by the widow.

We read that the widow was poor. Her total cash on hand was only two small copper coins. The fact that she had only two small copper coins implies two things. First, it implies that she had no family to help her. Second, it implies that she had a hard time just getting enough food to stay alive.

In that kind of poverty... she gave 100% of her cash; that’s a huge sacrifice. She gave two small copper coins... but modern translations might give us a wrong idea about the actual value of her gift. The NIV says that two copper coins given by the widow were, “worth only a fraction of a penny.”

We might think, what could she buy with less than a penny? Sure, she gave all she had... but that less-than-a penny offering would

not have bought her anything. We might think, since what she gave could not buy anything, she really did not sacrifice anything. What is important to note is that the widow's offering was NOT a WORTHLESS pair of coins that would have bought her nothing. Those two coins would have bought her A SMALL MEAL! And for that woman, food was hard to come by. The money she gave... would have put food in her growling stomach.

Today's passage does not demand that we give ALL we have... but today's passage DOES demand that we give... in ways that are truly SACRIFICIAL...

God's Words demands that we give an amount of money that we will actually miss. For some people, a 10% TITHE is a sacrifice.

The New Testament does not explicitly command TITHING, and God might lead some of you to give less than 10 percent of your income. And... God might want some of you to give MORE than 10 percent of your income. If giving 10 percent is not a SACRIFICE... then giving 10 percent may not ENOUGH.

As I see it... it is possible for wealthy people to give SACRIFICIALLY without giving themselves into poverty. For example, I believe that Nicodemus gave SACRIFICIALLY when he provided seventy-five pounds of expensive myrrh and aloes for the burial of Jesus... but even though that giving was SACRIFICIAL, I don't think Nicodemus was begging for food the next day!

And this is an important point because compared to the vast majority of people who have ever lived and compared to the majority of people who are alive now, each of us in this room is rich.

If we have enough food and water, and a roof over our heads, then compared to MOST people, we are rich. ALL of us are rich people who will have to pass through "the eye of a needle," by the grace of God!

For me... and maybe for you, SACRIFICIAL giving may include things like giving up a fancy dinner so that we can give more to God's work. For me... and maybe for you, SACRIFICIAL giving includes wearing old clothes and living with less... so that we can give more.

The TRUE measure of stewardship is NOT how much we GIVE to God; the TRUE measure of stewardship is how much we KEEP for ourselves! We know people are doing it tough in today's economy

Please listen very carefully... in 2025, some people may need to cut the amount of money that they give to God. But... if our giving to God is the only thing we cut, then we have a serious spiritual problem! If we cut what we give to God... but we do not also cut our spending on luxury items, then we have a serious spiritual problem. If we cut what we give to God... but we do not also cut what we spend on hobbies and entertainment, then we have a serious spiritual problem.

Christian Stewardship is a matter of the HEART, a matter of LOVE and COMMITMENT. If we LOVE God... then we can make SACRIFICES joyfully, joyful sacrifices of BOTH time... and money.

As you consider what you will give to God, please ask God to guide you... and remember, if you're only giving what you will not miss, then according to God, YOU PROBABLY ARE NOT GIVING ENOUGH.

As you consider what you will give to God, please ask yourself these questions:

- Are the time and money I give to God an adequate expression of GRATITUDE for all that God gives to me?
- Do the time and money I give to God accurately represent my LOVE for my Lord and Savior?

Lets' Pray