

WEALTH

*... is not in our hands to get or keep but in God's hands to give and receive.*

# 2

## *The Way to* **LASTING WEALTH:**

### *Become a Generous Giver!*

It was not easy for me to learn to be generous! At a very young age, I was a confirmed “penny pincher.” Every dollar I earned went into my savings account at the First National Bank of LaGrange.



As a young boy, I opened a savings account at this bank and viewed it as my way to success. But God had important lessons for me to learn about money.

By the time I entered high school, I was very proud of all the money I had earned. I actually felt sympathy for fellow students who were not as financially well off as I thought I was.

I never will forget that Sunday morning when God “invaded” my financial world. I was listening to a representative of The Gideons International as he explained how they provide New Testaments for school-children. God then reminded me of a passage in the Bible: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through



On Sunday morning at this church, God talked to me about my bank account and changed the course of my life.



This was The Gideons International headquarters when my father was the executive director. During his tenure, he received a telegram from General Douglas MacArthur requesting millions of New Testaments and a thousand missionaries for Japan.



As my father read the telegram from General MacArthur, I saw the pain in his face. He could send the New Testaments, but he had no missionaries to send. This motivated me to train young people who could travel quickly to a nation when an opportunity opened up.

nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

I realized that my treasure and my heart were securely stored in the First National Bank of LaGrange. I knew what God had in mind for my hard-earned bank account. At twenty cents a Testament, I figured out how many I could sponsor with all of my money. The struggle between doing what I knew God wanted and hanging on to what I desired became intense!

Then the second Biblical “bomb” dropped from heaven—another passage that I had memorized: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings” (Malachi 3:8). That was convicting! I suddenly realized that I had never given God His portion of any of the dollars I had earned.

## Negotiating With God

I began to negotiate with God: “Lord, I will give you 10% of my bank account!” Somehow, that idea did not seem to even reach the ceiling. So, I upped the offer: “I will give you 50% of all that I have earned.”

It was then that the rest of the passage came to my mind: “Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room

enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). That settled the matter. I wanted to prove God with 100% of my money. This meant taking the funds that I was going to use to buy a car and turning them into New Testaments for schoolchildren.

What happened during the following year is an amazing testimony of God’s ability to open up the windows of heaven and shower out blessings. It is important to note that the passage does not say “shower out money,” because the blessings of God usually involve things that are more valuable than money, such as faith, fellowship with God, inward peace, joy, genuine love, health, and creativity.

## God’s “Windows” Open Up

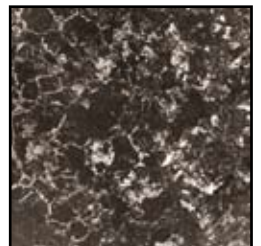
God did choose to confirm that He also could pour out money for the things that I needed. A man who worked for a steel company learned that I had built a photo lab in my basement. He asked if I would be able to develop film of highly magnified steel. The molecular structure of the steel would reveal the various types of alloys and their relative strengths. I gladly did the work after school, and he paid me very well for it.

By the next year, in the bank I had twice the amount of money that I had given away, plus a car that was better than one I could have purchased with all of those resources! This amazed me!

I was thrilled with my car and my increased bank account. God saw my excitement and discerned that my excitement for money and possessions was stronger than my delight in Him, the Giver of all good things. He knew that I still needed some further lessons on



Not only did God give me back twice the money I had given Him, but He also gave me a car better than I could have purchased with the money I had given away.



The metallography that I was asked to do revealed the alloys of steel to determine its relative strength and durability. My work for this steel company was later used as an entry for a Future Scientists and Engineers of America contest, which won a top award.



There was no reason for my car to stop on the highway since I had just gotten it fixed.

There was also no reason why the vehicle behind me did not see that I had stopped. Its headlights became larger and brighter as I realized that God was getting ready to take me through a new experience.



When we give something to God, it instantly becomes holy because it belongs to Him. He is then free to take it from us or to allow us to continue using it. In either case, we must be prepared to thank Him for whatever He chooses to do.

how to conquer my focus on money and look to Him as the source for all my needs. Therefore, He arranged for the following event to take place.

## The Lord Gives and Takes Away

One evening as I was driving home after a meeting, my car suddenly stalled. I thought, “This is strange; I just spent money to get it all tuned up.” I looked in the rearview mirror and saw the headlights of an approaching vehicle. The lights were getting larger and larger very quickly, coming up right behind me. I wondered if the driver saw me, so I blinked my taillights several times. His headlights were still in my lane and getting very big and very bright.

I realized that he was going to hit my car. Therefore, I slid down in the driver’s seat so that my head would not get jerked back, and I held onto the steering wheel, waiting for the impact that would catapult me down the road.

A moment later I felt and heard a terrific crash. My car went skidding down the highway! I was uninjured, so I climbed out of the car to survey the new “accordion design” of my car!

## A New Perspective on the Crash

After getting the necessary information from the driver who had hit me, I realized that I was not going anywhere with that car, so I ran down the road to look for a phone to call a tow truck. As I ran, I experienced a spirit of joy and excitement!

When I tell this to people, they often give me a funny look, and I know what they are thinking: “Bill, why were you so happy? Are you sure nothing happened to *you* in that accident?”

I was joyful because I was able to say to God: “Lord, I dedicated that car to You. It’s Your car. If You want to wreck Your car, that is all right with me!”

For several months, I was without a car, because I had no money; I also had given away that *second* bank account. God had me in just the right position for Him to demonstrate this promise: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom” (Luke 6:38).

One day a man called up and said: “Bill, I have a nine-passenger station wagon. I would like to give it to you for your youth work.” I thanked him and picked up the car.

Several days later, another man called and said: “Bill, I have a car I am not using any more. Could you use it?” I never like to turn things down, so I got it too. Then Chuck Sebastian, the owner of one of the radio stations over which I was broadcasting my Saturday morning radio programs, called and said: “Bill, I want to give you a car. It is very fast.” It certainly was! It was a “souped-up” Simca and went 60 miles an hour in second gear—with the brakes on!



The cars pictured above represent the styles of the cars, but not the actual cars, given to me.



The following event took place in Bartlett Hall (pictured above), which was my dorm at Wheaton College.



I lived in that dorm for an entire year. Only once do I remember that phone ever ringing, and it was just at the moment of need with just the message I needed to hear. God is precise with His timing and His provisions.



Notice God's sequence: "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Luke 6:38). In other words, we must initiate the giving.

Then, a medical doctor called to say that he was giving me his air-conditioned Lincoln car! Before long I was sitting at my desk, flipping through car titles. There were seven of them—more than my driveway could handle! God surely did open up the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing beyond what I had imagined!

## A "Hug" From My Loving God

After attending junior college for two years, I went on to Wheaton College for the remaining two years. One beautiful warm spring afternoon, I was walking to my dorm when I realized that it was my mother's birthday and I would be going home that evening. I said, "Lord, You have all my money, and it would be nice if I had twenty dollars to buy a gift for my mother."

Just as I entered my dorm, the phone in the hallway rang. No one else was there, so I picked it up. I heard a man's voice say, "Is there someone there who would like to earn a little money?" I said: "Yes! Me!" He said: "I need someone to dig a trench in my backyard. It should only take about an hour." I told him that I would love to do it!

It was delightful to be outdoors and get some exercise by digging that trench. As he drove me back to my dorm, he explained that he was a descendant of P. T. Barnum of circus fame. As I got out of the car, he handed me something—a twenty-dollar bill! I thanked him for his generosity and then just looked at that bill. That was not just a coincidence. It had been arranged by God to show His attention to the details of my needs. It was like a great big hug from God, Who "loveth a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7).

## A Mansion and a Miracle

There is a historic mansion on Lake Geneva. It was built at the turn of the century by Otto Young, a wealthy businessman in Chicago. It had a breathtaking interior, including huge marble fireplaces, domed ceilings with Rembrandt-type paintings on them, and a marble-columned ballroom.

The inlaid floors and the intricately carved ceiling molding were awesome! There was a magnificent, wide, winding, mahogany staircase to the second and third floors. In each bedroom was a hand-carved marble fireplace (imported from Italy), and a stunning, unique pattern of inlaid wood embellished the floor of each room. I asked the owner if we could use the mansion for a weekend retreat, and he allowed us to do so. The building could hold up to 150 teenagers.

When the young people walked into the building, their mouths dropped open in awe as they looked at the splendor of the interior. The surroundings motivated them to be attentive during each session. The retreat was so successful that I asked if we could hold a series of meetings there. The owner agreed.



A view of the fifty-room mansion on Lake Geneva



Some of the ornate detail in the grand ballroom, which was carried throughout the building and even in the kitchen, where sculptured wood molding was used in the ceilings. Beautiful murals were painted in the domes of the ceilings between the marble columns.



Early in my high school years, I often would go to a forest preserve south of my home early in the morning to seek the Lord. It was a special secluded area off the beaten path that became my "Bethel."

A large fallen log served as both my bench from which to read the Scriptures and also my altar from which to pray. Precious times were experienced with the Lord during these early morning watches.

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up"  
(Psalm 5:3).

### ***An "Insurmountable" Challenge Faced Us***

On the Sunday before the first retreat was to begin, the owner said, "Bill, you cannot come up here with your retreats!" I was stunned and asked, "Why not?" He said: "Because the fire marshal came out and said that we must install a fire alarm system in the building. If we do not have it installed, he will padlock the building."

I thought of all the work and money that had gone into the planning of those retreats and the hundreds of young people who were already registered to come. So I asked, "How long would it take to get the fire alarm system installed?"

He explained the procedure: "First, the plans must be drawn up and submitted to the city. After they are approved, you must order the fire alarm equipment from the factory. After they make it and ship it out, it must be installed and inspected. There is no human way to get all of that done in five days!" I asked, "If we do get it in, will you let us go ahead with the retreats?" He laughed and said, "Sure!"

Immediately, I called my friend Charlie Reavis, who was an electrician. I said, "Charlie, I have a special need that I am hoping you can take care of." He asked what it was, and I replied, "We need to install an alarm system in the mansion at Lake Geneva." He asked, "When does it need to be in?" I said, "By this Friday!" He gasped and said: "That would be humanly impossible! I have rush orders at the factory now from customers who have been waiting for several weeks!" I said, "What if we just try and see what happens?" He agreed.

On Friday, I drove up to Lake Geneva. As I pulled into the drive, another car pulled in behind me. It was the city fire inspector. We walked into the building together and saw Charlie on a ladder, putting the final adjustments on the alarm system. He called out to his assistant, "Try it out again!" We heard the resounding alarm throughout the building! What a beautiful sound!

Several months later Charlie gave a testimony at a youth rally about what actually had happened during those five days. He broke down in tears as he explained how God had worked supernaturally on his behalf, through split-second timing and the favor of all who had been involved. In more than thirty years of electrical work, he had never before experienced anything like it. He said that he would never forget being involved in a true miracle, and many of those hundreds of young people who attended the retreats never forgot the spiritual decisions they made because of his work.

### **An Amazing Opportunity**

Several years later, the owner of the Lake Geneva mansion came to see me and said, "The mansion is being sold for back taxes!" I asked him how much was owed on the taxes, and he said, "Seventy-four thousand dollars!"

I asked in astonishment, "Are you telling me that someone could buy that mansion for only \$74,000?!" He said: "Yes, and I own the first mortgage and would



The goal of our life should not be to acquire things but to look for opportunities in which God can demonstrate His love and power: "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (II Chronicles 16:9).



A miracle can be a natural event with supernatural timing. Hubert Mitchell was a missionary to the people of Sumatra. They could not picture the spikes that held Jesus on the cross. Hubert opened a can of food he had just received from back home, and there—in the can—was a large spike!