

When I was a kid in middle school & high school

I was on the track team ... I was a fast runner and so I ran (in those days) what was called the 100 yard dash.

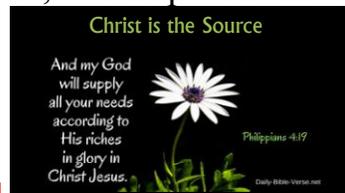
I was quite good at it, actually ... winning most all of the races I ran and making it to the state championships my senior year of high school.

Over those years of competing,

beginning in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year through graduation from high school, I developed this understanding that my ability to “run fast” was a “God-given” ability.

I mean, I didn’t decide I wanted to run fast, I just could. Sure, I worked at it in my high school years to enhance my quickness of stride, but in the end I believed that the raw ability was a “God-given” gift.

I was understanding this gift of “*fleetness of foot*” as having its source in God ... or, in the spirit of our stewardship theme this year, I was understanding



it like this ... screen 1

**Christ is the Source.**

This is a basic Christian tenet of belief, we believe all that we have

comes from God ... be it food,  
material goods, or  
talents and skills ... all have as their source in  
God our Creator ... **Christ is the Source**

There is a common character

in all of the scripture readings that we hear this morning ... I’m talking about the  
**WIDOW**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> reading from 1 Kings ... We have the Widow of Zarepath who is engaged by the Prophet Elijah. He asks her to provide him with a meal, even



Widow of Zarepath

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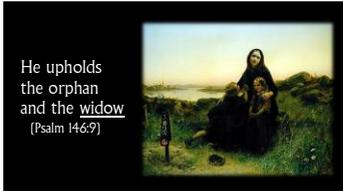
though her resources are meager. It's

difficult for her to

provide for she and her son, let alone a stranger. (1 Kings 17:8-16)

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In the Psalm ... Psalm 146 sings praises to God, not only for majesty and power, but also for how this great and powerful God helps those in need ... this is where the



He upholds  
the orphan  
and the widow  
(Psalm 146:9)

screen 3

widow is referenced in the psalm – *The Lord watches over the*

*strangers; he*

*upholds the orphan and the widow* (Psalm 146:9)

screen 4



Widow's Mite  
Mark 12:38-42

In the reading from Mark ... the

The story of (what has come to be called)

“Widow’s Mite ... it is a fairly well-known episode in the life and ministry of Jesus.

A women (a widow) puts the last of her coins into the Temple Treasury.

And there is a common theme as it relates to

the widow in these passages ... First of all, widows are poor, here’s a brief summary

## The Widow

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of their situation:

- **Palestinian Hebrew women were among the poorest in the world in Jesus' day.**
- **Widows had it even worse ... a married woman whose husband had died and who remained unmarried experienced both a personal and social plight. Poverty and indebtedness were all too often descriptive of her financial situation. She was frequently placed alongside the orphan and the landless immigrant**

as representative of the poorest of the poor.

- She had little, if any, inheritance rights. The loss of a husband in ancient Israel was a social and economic tragedy.
- Her crisis was aggravated if she had no able-bodied children (specifically male) to aid in giving financial support.
- Since she was in an extremely vulnerable economic position, she often became the prime target of exploitation.
- The prophets of the Old Testament often warned of the ill-treatment of widows.
- Jesus followed in the footsteps of his prophetic predecessors with his concern for the plight of the widow.

He healed a widow's son because of compassion for her and her situation ([Luke 7:11-17](#)); He protested the exploitation of widows ... we read about that today ([Mark 12:40](#)) ... in this event of the widow's mite, Jesus reversed the standards by which people were judged: the widow gave from her poverty while the wealthy merely gave from their abundance ([Mark 12:41-42](#)).

- The church, in the early centuries of its development, defined the essence of true religion as demonstrating compassion to the poor and needy, in particular the widow and the orphan ([James 1:27](#))

The “widow”, in the bible, is a symbol for all the poor, for those in hard times economically and otherwise.

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The second thing common in what we hear today

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in the readings from I Kings and Mark is that these poor widows give of their resources even though it seems they need everything they have to provide for themselves.

The Widow of Zarepath provides for the Prophet Elijah from her meager supply of food. The widow that Jesus observes gives her last coins in support of the Temple Treasury.

## What is the motivation to give out of such deprivation?

Could it be

that they both believed in and lived out of a posture of faith that understood God to be the

source of all they had ... that though they were giving of their last resources they believed and lived by the words of Psalm 146 - *The Lord watches over the*

*strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow?*

Could it be

that they both were believing in and living by the spirit of our stewardship theme for

screen 7



2019 ... **Christ is the Source?**

It seems that understanding

**Christ is the Source** is more apparent when resources are scarce ... you would think it

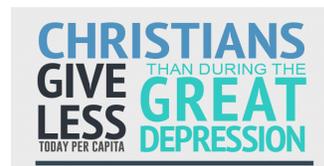
would be the other way around – that with ample resources one would readily acknowledge the source of their blessings.

But studies seem to indicate otherwise:

**Surveys of charitable giving show that America's poor donate more, in percentage terms, than do higher-income groups.**

**What's more, their generosity declines less in hard times than does the generosity of richer givers.**

screen 8



I came across these little statistical gems as well:  
**today per capita than**

**Christians give less**

**they did during the Great Depression of 1929.**

and



screen 9

**if you make less**

**Statistics suggest that**

**than 20k, you're eight times more likely to give and be generous than someone who makes more than \$75k**

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What might an explanation be to this counter intuitive phenomenon?

Well, some researchers say that people of lower incomes

are familiar with resource scarcity and how vulnerable it makes them ... and that such

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awareness makes them more generous because they know what it's like to be in need.

Without the constant threat to financial survival and all the stress that it brings,

people of middle and higher income levels don't notice deprivation from a "feeling level"

and therefore the motivation to give and be generous isn't there as much.

What that's saying to me is that ... The more we have the more likely it is that we forget the SOURCE of our blessings; or at least, are not as cognizant of that source as much on a regular basis.

(Kind of like you don't realize the blessing that having two arms is until you have to do without one)

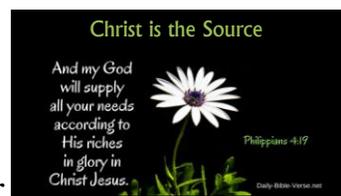
The less we have the more likely we are to be aware of the SOURCE of what it is that we do have.

It is a case of noticing on all levels ... body, mind, and spirit that... **Christ is the Source.**

It is a case of reminding ourselves regularly that it's from God

that all of what we have and who we are comes ... **Christ is the Source.**

Whether you are poor or wealthy or somewhere in between ... it's always a case of noticing and being aware that **Christ is the Source.**



This is our Stewardship theme for the coming year

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2019 ... **Christ is the Source** ... it is in recognizing this that we understand that ALL is "gift";

it is from this posture that thankfulness wells up within us;

it is in recognizing this ... **Christ is the Source** ... that living generously becomes our quest, our practice, and our privilege!

AMEN