

A Biblical View of Economics

By Jim Wicker

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

You and your family are being relocated for a year. You need someone to take care of your prize dog (or car—pick an item or animal that is dear to you). Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What do you expect that steward of your possession to do?

Assignment Two

Prepare to share your answer to the following question: List several benefits you might receive from your job in addition to the wages you earn.

Assignment Three

Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Have you ever been cheated in a financial transaction? How did that make you feel, and what did you do about it? If nothing comes to mind, ask someone else to give you an example.

Scripture to Memorize

The earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. Psalm 24:1

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand that a biblical view of economics involves a proper view of stewardship, sin, work and justice.

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Jim enjoys presenting gospel and comedy illusion shows at churches, fire-eating, juggling, unicycle riding, and performing comedy nunchucks. He annually leads tour groups to Israel or other Bible-related lands in Europe and the Middle East. Contact him at jwicker@swbts.edu.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Tyler really wants to buy the new iPhone 35. Its holographic imaging system and killer apps are amazing, yet he is faced with two huge problems. First, the phone is so expensive he simply cannot afford it. Second, even if he had the money, the local Apple Store ran out of the phones because the demand is so high. Tyler can think of little else throughout the day than how cool it would be if he owned the latest iPhone. He probably does not realize it, but a biblical view of economics can help him with his problem.

Introduction

Economics is the study of commodities and wealth. Economics deals with human behavior in regard to the production, distribution and consumption of commodities. Man-made economic theories often contain unbiblical assumptions. For instance, classic liberalism tries to replace God with a welfare state. Socialism ignores the sinfulness of man and the God-given right to own property. Communism typically rejects God. Even capitalism is problematic if its users ignore biblical ethics. So, what is the biblical view of economics? Several basic principles appear in many places throughout Scripture.

Read Matthew 25:14–30 out loud.

God Owns It All and We Are Stewards

Studying the Passage

Verse 14. like a man. This man represents Jesus in this parable. **Going on a journey.** Jesus is about to go to heaven for an extended period of time. **his servants.** These three slaves represent Christians, serving our Master.

Verse 15. five talents . . . two . . . one. A talent is a huge sum of money, worth about six thousand days' wages for a common laborer in those days (a total of some fifteen to twenty years' wages). The master is rich! **according to his own ability.** The master determines the amount to give each servant based on the servant's competence and skill.

Verses 20, 22. you delivered. Another rendering of "delivered" is "entrusted." What the servants had was not their own. They were stewards of the master's money, and they eventually had to answer to him regarding how they handled his money.

Verses 21, 23. well done. The master praised and rewarded the slaves who were good stewards of his money.

Verse 26. wicked and slothful servant. The master rebuked and punished the servant who was a bad steward and did nothing with his money.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Question

We are God's stewards. What expectations does God have for us in regard to the time, talents,

abilities, money and possessions He entrusts to us?

On Your Own

In the space below, write two actions you will take in the near future that reflect you are a steward of whatever God has entrusted to you.

Work Is Good

Read Genesis 2:15 out loud.

Studying the Passage, Genesis 2:15

Verse 15. the man. This is Adam, the first human. **the garden.** The garden of Eden was not like modern gardens that are full of flowers for a pleasing appearance. Ancient gardens contained vegetables and fruits for human consumption and enjoyment. **to work it and keep it.** This is the first description of work. God commanded Adam to work *prior* to the fall (Genesis 3), so work is good and is our God-given task.

Paul admonished some Christians at Thessalonica who simply stopped working because they expected Jesus to return at any minute. "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The church was not to give handouts to able-bodied, lazy believers.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Question

Since God made work and work is good, why do you think so many people complain about their jobs?

On Your Own

What kind of life vocation do you believe God is leading you to do? What can you be doing now to prepare yourself for that work or further develop your skill in that area? In the space below, list three actions you can take.

We Must Be Just and Kind to Others

Read Micah 6:8–13 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 8. O man. The prophet Micah addressed the people of Judah in 735 BC. First, he said what they *should* be doing. **justice.** Be fair and honest with other people. **kindness.** Be considerate of others. **humbly.** Put others before yourself—a quality that was foreign to ancient people. See Hosea 12:7 for a similar list of requirements.

Verse 9. to fear. This called-for response was a mixture of both reverence and fear toward God. **Your name.** The way people treat God's name is also the way they treat God.

Verse 10. Then Micah rebuked the wrongs people were doing. This was a typical message of the Old Testament prophets because all people are sinners (Isaiah 59:7–15; Romans 3:23). **treasures of wickedness.** The material profits from being unjust and unkind were bad. **The scant measure.** Using this unjust measurement cheated the customer.

Verse 11. wicked scales . . . deceitful weights. Dishonest scales and false weights resulted in cheating the customer out of a fair exchange of goods. These practices were also condemned in Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:5; and Proverbs 11:1.

Verse 12. rich men . . . violence. The rich taking advantage of the poor was depicted as doing violence against them. **Lies . . . deceitful.** Yet not just the rich acted wickedly. All of the residents of Jerusalem were liars and full of deceit.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Question

Are there levels of justice? What if you notice that a store clerk gives you an extra dime in change by mistake? Is it really worth saying something about it? Why or why not?

On Your Own

Write down three ways you can be fair, just, and kind to others.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Tyler asks you for some advice about his potential iPhone 35 purchase. Here are some questions you can ask him now that you have a better understanding of biblical economics.

1. Would this purchase be good stewardship of the money God has entrusted to Tyler? This answer may be a gray area and could depend on a number of factors, so let's keep asking questions.
2. Could Tyler purchase a comparable phone for less money? The iPhone is expensive due to supply and demand factors, and good stewardship involves not only asking if a purchase is necessary, but also finding what the best purchase would be. However, what if Tyler determines he needs the iPhone to see the holographic image of his physics teacher's lectures? Tyler decides he could help finance the purchase by selling his old iPhone.
3. Will Tyler be fair in the business transaction when he sells the phone? Will he point out the hairline crack on the case that the potential buyer might miss?
4. Did Tyler come up with the money to buy the iPhone from honest work? If so, he can feel good about the purchase as a fruit of his labor. If he got the money dishonestly, he should return it. If he was given the money by someone else, he should show them gratitude.

One final thought: it is a blessing for someone like Tyler to be able to interact in a free-market economy in which he can exercise Christian values while buying and selling property at his choosing. Despite some shortcomings, the free-market economy in the USA is perhaps the most biblical system today.

1. It allows us to freely and fully exercise our Christian values in the marketplace.
2. It upholds the value of work and allows the free exchange of property.
3. It promotes human flourishing by preserving the worth and freedom of every individual.

Follow up Question

How does man's sinfulness affect the way we deal economically with others?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.