

# Takers, Traders, and Investors

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Nabal, a sheep owner, was more than wealthy—he was super rich. He owned 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats. In his day, that made him very rich.

Sheep need shearing once a year—usually in the Spring. Can you imagine shearing thousands of animals without electric clippers? Sheep, fortunately, become still and cannot wiggle when they are on their backs with all four feet in the air. It takes great skill for shearers to flip sheep onto their backs, but once done, shearers can cut wool from passive sheep. Shearing is a huge job, but Nabal, of course, had plenty of hired workers to help get it done.

Once the sheep were shorn, *everyone* rejoiced. This time of rejoicing was more than just payday for the workers. It was party time for all—a time to celebrate. The festivities included family, friends, and servants; everyone living in close proximity was invited—foreigners, strangers, and the poor. After the *shearing* came the *sharing*.

Another example of biblical hospitality comes from the time of Nehemiah. What did Nehemiah instruct his people to do?

“Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared.’ . . . And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly” (Nehemiah 8:10–12).<sup>1</sup> Sharing, giving away food and drink, was a top priority. Fun times were to extend beyond family and friends. It was an opportunity to share God’s blessings.

But, let's go back to the time of Nabal—that was also the time of David. David and his men looked in anticipation to the festivities soon to take place at Nabal's Ranch. David, as you remember, had been hiding in nearby caves, trying to elude jealous King Saul. David and his men had protected Nabal's shepherds and sheep from bandits and wild animals— but David was not seeking compensation from Nabal.

David and his men were living near Nabal's place. According to custom, they should have been included at Nabal's party, but the invitation never came. So what did David do?

*“David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, ‘Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity: ‘Peace be to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have! Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore, let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David,’” (1 Samuel 25:5–8).*

Does it not seem brash for David's men to invite themselves to Nabal's party? Not at all. David was not a beggar. He was simply following a code of conduct. God had given specific instructions regarding who was to come to such social events. Scripture states, “You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates” (Deuteronomy 16:14). God instructs us to invite individuals we

might leave off our list. He especially wants us to remember the destitute, lonely, foreigners—those who are often forgotten.

So how does Nabal react to the request from David's men? We are told in 1 Samuel, "So when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and waited" (25:9). Picture the scene. David's 10 men made their modest request and Nabal humiliated them by making them wait.

Nabal was quiet—an awkward silence. It's as if Nabal pondered whether David and his men were worthy or not. Nabal should have felt ashamed that these men had to come and ask. He should have apologized for not having already invited them to his feast. But Nabal was selfish—and foolish.

Finally, Nabal answered them, but notice how: "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" (verses 10, 11).

Nabal responded rhetorically. His questions didn't seek information; they were meant to insult. He demeaned David by asking, "Who is David?" David, of course, was a national hero, and Nabal knew it. He continued his condescending response by asking, "Who is the son of Jesse?" Nabal implied that David was a "nobody," that he was irrelevant. Nabal dismissed David as if he were a worthless hooligan. But he was not finished with his meanness. "Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?" (verse 11).

Nabal demonstrated a distorted worldview. He believed the things under his roof

were his and his alone. “*My bread, my water, my shearers*”—that was his focus. He allowed greed to condition his mind. Greed closed Nabal’s eyes where he no longer saw God as the Source of every good thing.

Nabal should have known better. He was a descendant of Caleb—a great man of faith. Nabal knew his duty and responsibility. He knew God had designed that those with abundance should supply those who lacked; that we are our brother’s keeper. Nabal had a God-given obligation to keep an eye out for strangers within his gates, but Nabal closed his eyes, and so the Bible calls him a fool.

Many years later, Jesus tells us, “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:13, 14). Helping those in need is not just a good idea. It’s actually a mandate from Jesus.

Is there an individual or a family that has been excluded from your circle? You and I are to share what God has given us with these individuals. What about our church? Do we share our blessings with the church? That’s the question Jesus is asking us.

Prince William of Great Britain was born into a royal and rich family. In spite of his royalty and wealth, he demonstrated concern for the homeless. Before his marriage in 2011, he reportedly spent a night sleeping in freezing weather on a London street. He wanted to experience the plight of the poor.<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, he attended an event for a homelessness charity. This is where he met Shozna.

Shozna suffered a stroke as a teenager. The right side of her body was paralyzed. A series of tragedies led her to become homeless at eighteen. Prince William, at the time of

the wedding, remembered Shozna and sent her an invitation to his wedding. Shozna underwent a complete makeover before she attended Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding. Shozna said she "felt beautiful" sitting among royalty at Westminster Abbey.<sup>3</sup>

When it's time to celebrate, let's not remember just family and friends. God wants us to intentionally include the poor, afflicted, and lonely. Just how important it is to care for the needy is illustrated by the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities are known for their wickedness. Why did God destroy Sodom? The Bible states, "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49, NIV). God rained fire upon Sodom— not just because of her sexual and other perversions, but because they did not extend their hands to those in need.

### **Three kinds of people**

John Maxwell writes that there are three kinds of people: Takers, Traders, and Investors.<sup>4</sup> Everyone knows who the takers are. They are the Nabals in society. They take more than they give. They wait for others to give so that they can enjoy the benefits. They love to make "withdrawals" while they expect others to make "deposits." A community full of takers is devastating; but a church full of takers is worse. Takers ignore God's expressed commands to share God's blessings.

The second group is traders. Traders are also foolish. They give in order to receive. Traders are busy looking for their own set of friends. They may be generous with their friends, but they also keep a close eye on what they receive in return. Traders

prefer being Takers—but they recognize it is socially unacceptable. Nabal was a taker, but by necessity he was also a trader.

Then there are investors. Investors are the wise stewards in God's kingdom. Investors actively look for ways to help. They look for strangers in church so that they can be friendly to them. They go out of their way to help those who are in need. Their eyes are quick to notice what needs to be done and they do it. They give freely to support the church's ministries. Investors for God are focused on God's kingdom—not on themselves. They give without a thought of receiving anything in return. They know that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

In the New Testament, the church at Macedonia was full of investors. They were financially poor, but nevertheless they were investors. Notice what they did:

*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

*And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God (2 Corinthians 8:1–5; emphasis supplied).*

These church members were poor—yet they begged for the honor of sharing. They considered giving to be a privilege—not a burden or an obligation. How did this happen?

Verse 5 answers this question. They *first* gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* they opened up their hearts and wallets. They gave above and beyond because they had first given their lives to God.

## **What about us?**

How is it with us? Are we takers, traders, or investors? How would you classify yourself? Do we like to take, trade, or are we willing investors?

Many years ago, I taught at a school. A fellowship meal was planned for the faculty and everyone was asked to bring food. The plan was to celebrate the Lord's Supper after enjoying a meal together. I envisioned tables bountifully laden with tasty homemade dishes—plenty of food for all. It was disappointing to see most of the families arriving with small plates of food. Each family was hoping, of course, that others would bring generous amounts of food. The meal was headed for disaster because too many demonstrated “taker” traits. The school's food service director, fortunately, came to our rescue by pulling large cans of food from the cafeteria pantry.

Generosity is an attribute that is seen not only in the actions of the wealthy. The poor, in fact, are often proportionately more generous. Our family served as missionaries in a poor region of Brazil. Frequently, needy children came to our house asking for bread. One day, my wife gave a large slice of homemade bread to a boy who had come to our door. The boy, however, did not immediately start eating the bread. A group of friends were waiting for him, and once he left our house, they soon formed a circle around him. He then tore off a piece for everyone before he ate the last bite. The joy of sharing was more important than filling his own stomach. His act of sharing made him an investor

in others.

## **Our response**

So how do we react when others don't give the way we think they should? How do we respond when we personally suffer as a result of exclusiveness and selfishness? Do we harbor resentment and anger?

The Bible tells us that David was furious when his men returned and told him what Nabal had said about him. David quickly decided to teach Nabal an unforgettable lesson: he planned to kill Nabal. This story, fortunately, did not end with murder because Abigail, Nabal's peacemaker wife, sprang into action. Nabal deserved judgment, but David was not the one to render it. We can never make things right by doing wrong. As the prophet Amos tell us, "For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate. Therefore, the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time" (Amos 5:12, 13). Even when injustice is done to us, it is best to depend on God to make things right. God, in His own way and time, will make things right.

Jesus tells us that God looks at our actions. Listen to the words of Jesus:

*"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' . . . And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of*



*these My brethren, you did it to Me,” (Matthew 25:34–40).*

How do we treat others? How do we treat the needy? What kind of stewards are we? These are questions we need to continually ask ourselves.

My mother-in-law was constantly on the alert for people in need. She often invited to her home people who needed help or encouragement. Thanksgiving and Christmas for her were not just about family—they were opportunities to intentionally include the lonely. My job was to go and pick up anyone who did not have transportation. Martha, as I will call her, did not have a car, so I drove across town to pick her up.

She lived alone in a rundown motel room and was always thrilled to be included. Martha, one year, brought a gift; it was a large framed picture of her. I admit that sooner or later I would have tucked that large photo out of sight, but this is not what my mother-in-law did. She hung it in a prominent place in the hallway where it remained for years. I passed Martha's picture in the hallway countless times, and seeing her picture was a subtle reminder that *everybody* is important. My mother-in-law's actions were a wonderful gift to her children and grandchildren. They learned that people like Martha are to be at the top of our invitation list. When we help others, we really help ourselves. Stewardship means we are faithful to God and share God's blessings with others. When we are generous with others, we are being generous with Jesus. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."<sup>5</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Until the Lord Jesus Christ returns, there will be Takers, Traders, and Investors. The followers of Jesus Christ are called to share, just as Jesus shared. He shared His life

so that we may live eternally. We share not because we have to, but because, as followers of Jesus, we are faithful stewards who willingly share God's blessings.

#### Endnotes

1. All Bible texts, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from New King James Version.
2. [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1237773/Prince-William-sleeps-rough-streets-London-experience-life-homeless.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1237773/Prince-William-sleeps-rough-streets-London-experience-life-homeless.html).
3. <http://londonmuslims.blogspot.com/2011/04/shozna-homeless-muslim-royal-wedding.html>; [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1377756/Royal-Wedding-Homeless-girl-Shozna-20-wowed-Prince-William-invited.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1377756/Royal-Wedding-Homeless-girl-Shozna-20-wowed-Prince-William-invited.html)
4. John C. Maxwell, "The Boomerang Principle" in *Winning With People Workbook* (Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson Impact, 2004), 197.
5. [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/we\\_make\\_a\\_living\\_by\\_what\\_we\\_get-but\\_we\\_make\\_a/14355.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/we_make_a_living_by_what_we_get-but_we_make_a/14355.html).