

November 10: Stewardship Sunday

Message: When NOT to Give

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:21-24 (CEB)

Text: 2 Corinthians 9:7 “Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Memory Verse: Job 22:21 “Yield to God and be at peace with Him; in this way good will come to you.”

Blurb: Let’s talk about money! Money is the stuff of life. It is a blessing but it is also a bucking bronco. If we don’t keep tight control on it, it will throw us around! This Sunday we’ll engage the life-changing biblical view of money and learn how it can be a blessing from God that brings abundant life.

Opening Song: *Lift High the Name of Jesus* -Sanctify

Welcome: - David

Memory Verse: -David

“Yield to God and be at peace with Him; in this way good will come to you.” -Job 22:21

Worship Music Set: -Sanctify

Cover the Earth

Raise a Hallelujah

Restoration

Worship Prayer

Kid’s Moment: Widow’s Mite - Andrew

Grow Moment: Stewardship -Teresa Gruber

Prayers: In Honor of Veteran’s Day -David

Message: When NOT to Give

PP#1: When NOT to Give

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

When NOT to Give. 2 Corinthians 9:7 “Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

PP#2: When NOT to Give an Offering

1. How you spend your money is a spiritual vital sign

Okay, last Sunday I warned you that I would be preaching on money this week. And still you all showed up!

Well, I really get excited talking about money. I think the reason is that it's because it's really not about money itself: money is a way to talk about the health of our relationship with Jesus. It's one of those vital signs of our spiritual health. Don't you sometimes wonder about yourself, and how your faith is doing, how you're doing as a disciple of Jesus? Money provides a reading for us to see into our unseeable faith. It offers us a way for us to have tangible, measurable, concrete, observable data about our relationship with God.

Now, one reason money can be a sensitive topic is precisely because of this. I hate going to the doctor because before he'll see me, I have to step on a scale. And I know that my doctor will look at that number and be able to tell me some realities about my physical health.

Pastor Andrew and I met this past week with the other pastors in Forest Lake, and Pastor Mike Hazeltine, the pastor at Maranatha Church north of town, commented, "I don't want you to tell me what you believe. I don't want to hear it. I can look at your life and tell you what you believe. How you spend your time, money, how you behave and treat other people, this tells me what you believe."

Discipleship is not about what you know, or what you believe. Christianity is a walk, a lifestyle, a relationship. It's about what you do. Remember, the Bible says that even Satan *believes* that Jesus is Lord and Savior. But he doesn't follow in discipleship.

This is why money is so exciting! How are you doing in your belief? Just look at your last month's finances. That's one of your best spiritual vital signs.

PP#3: When NOT to Give an Offering

1. How you spend your money is a spiritual vital sign
2. God frames money in terms of stewardship and generosity

The other reason why I love talking about money is that it is such a common part of our ongoing lives. Literally and symbolically, money is the currency of our day-to-day. A huge part of what it means to be a person living in our world is managing our money - how we earn it, how we save it, and how we spend it. So, money is the stuff of life, and to talk about money is to talk about life.

Now, as you might have guessed, money is a hot topic in the Bible. For these very same reasons, the Bible talks about it *a lot*. This is a third reason I love talking about money: Jesus did!

Money in the Bible is framed 1) in terms of stewardship: how God owns everything we may claim we have and we are called to manage it well, and 2) in terms of generosity: how we have a God-given identity that must be giving and generous or else it will shrivel up and die.

A couple of years ago I summed up the Bible's teaching on money as the Methodist's method, which John Wesley put as three rules on money. Do you remember what they are? 1) Earn all you can - be industrious and hard working, 2) save all you can - don't live in a consumeristic style, and 3) give all you can - the core of Christian relationship to money is generosity. Earn more not to have more or spend more, but in order to give more.

PP#4: When NOT to Give an Offering

1. How you spend your money is a spiritual vital sign
2. God frames money in terms of stewardship and generosity
3. Tithing: Giving back to God your first 10% earned

All of our money belongs to God. God puts money through our hands to provide for our needs, to bless us with additional luxuries and extras, and to give away to God's work and share with others. But God also knows we struggle with knowing how much is appropriate for each of these categories: how much should I give away, how much can I spend on me for things I don't need? So, graciously, our Heavenly Father has provided a guideline. Of the money we earn, we *first*: give 10% to God's work, *then* we pay for our necessities, and *then from the rest* we can spend on extras and luxuries. So, let's flip this around. God says that all the money you earn really is His. My kid's money belongs to me, legally, as I constantly remind my kids! Also, God makes us *able* to earn what we do. Yet, He is a generous Lord, and tells us we can keep 90% of what God puts through our hands, to provide for our own ongoing needs as well as fun money.

Do you see how different this is from how we normally think about our money? We normally take what we get and start paying our fixed costs. But then we need to go shopping...we need to eat. But we see the giant size candy bar that our friend would just love, and we envision just how fun it would be to give it to her for Christmas. So, there's \$20. But it's next to the fishing rod that's on sale. Oh, and we're hosting Thanksgiving, and so we need the paper plates and tableware. Then there's gas to go to the tournament our son is in, and we'll need to go down the night before...\$100 for a hotel, with a pool, of course. The garage that is changing the oil on the car calls...time for tires. Dang! Wasn't ready to budget for that. But you really don't want to go basic for \$400. It's wise to buy the \$580 better traction tread...imagine slippery roads when the snow comes! Money well spent.

But now the purchases are adding up quickly, as usual, and we're starting to wonder if we'll have enough to cover the credit card bill. Then, at church, there's the appeal for bedding and a refrigerator for our missionaries. How much to give? How much can we afford? This is the way things actually go, right? We *believe* that we should give to God first, and we really want to, but life happens. But what did Pastor Mike say? "Show me your life, and I'll know what you believe."

PP#5: When NOT to Give an Offering

1. How you spend your money is a spiritual vital sign
2. God frames money in terms of stewardship and generosity
3. Tithing: Giving back to God your first 10% earned
4. Your church is your ally

So, here again is another reason why you need this church. We agree to help each other treat our money better and push each other into generosity. We need the help! We intend well, but....

This is why we continue to have offering time and passing around the offering plates. I know many churches are just putting out collection boxes for people to use, and many people are giving electronically. We're doing that, too. And you've been telling me that it's kind of embarrassing to have offering plates come around, and have very little in them. Guests could wonder if people here really don't give much!

We've talked through this, and I've insisted we need to keep up the offering time. The reason is that the offering is really not about collecting money for our church or for God's work that our church does. Offering really is crucial part of the way we worship. And having an offering time constantly reminds us all that disciples regularly and intentionally give. And the offering time is a regular reminder and calling for me to continue to give.

Personally, I give through a fund that sends checks in the mail. Last year I gave as an auto transfer out of my checking account. You'll rarely see me put something physically in the offering plate. In fact, most of the ushers have given up on me and don't even bother trying to pass the plate

to me. But I want to ask you to please do. I want that offering plate in my hand as your reminder to me, church, to keep consistent with my giving, and to keep growing in my giving.

It's also the reason why we hold a stewardship drive in November. As we are approaching the holidays, we start thinking about the outgo of money. And then there's New Year's, and the brand new 2020 ahead. We hold our stewardship drive in the late fall for the intentional reason that it can be a tool to help us plan our structured giving as we budget for our new year.

The cards that Teresa was explaining that we're handing out, they are a tool to help you manage your giving better. We know how hard it is to stay consistent and continue to give as you want all year long. So, rather than giving as you go—seeing how much you can give after you need tires—we want to help you follow the biblical principle of giving first. Plan now, before you get to the year, what your giving should be, and plan that amount. Create the discipline to live on the rest.

Write that amount down...we've provided cards so you can do that. Next Sunday, return the cards in the offering plate as way to symbolize how you are giving to God first the first 10% of what you earn. Only two people will ever see them - our bound-to-secrecy financial secretary, and you!

Then, to help you throughout the year, our financial secretary will keep track of your giving and produce reports back to you to help you stay on track with your giving.

We do this as a church not because we in any way need to know how much you will give, or how much you do give, but because we covenant with you to help you stay accountable to your own discerned giving. Those that don't have this support, find themselves struggling to keep up with their desired level of giving.

And I just want to say a blunt word about #3, tithing. There is no magic about tithing, it won't get you more money. It's simply the way to a healthy relationship with your money. I also know that many Christians don't tithe. Honestly, that's your business. But as your pastor, that makes me very concerned for you. For I am convinced that you are hurting yourself. You are keeping yourself stuck in the entrapment of money. I know you mean well. I know you desire. But your behavior is keeping you in a money mess. And those who say that they can't afford to tithe are simply wrong. You are using that as an excuse not to put your money under discipleship to Christ. I will go so far as to say that you are taking money out of God's hand and using it to buy luxuries you don't need. I normally don't preach so bluntly. But, not only do I know this from my study of the Bible, I know this from my own life experience. For years I didn't tithe. There were times I had to borrow to meet my monthly fixed costs - we were eating bologna and white bread sandwiches. And we just couldn't get ahead. It wasn't until we just decided to choose obedience and tithe first, that our financial mess finally started to turn around. Again, no magic. It's just the path of abundant life.

And, I need to clarify, you don't have to pay your tithe to this church. You must pay it to God's work. Now, I can show you why giving to this church is an amazing way to give to God's work...come back next Sunday and stay for the narrative budget report. It'll impress you. But give 10% to whatever ways God is guiding you. I will say that if you are a member of this church, part of your covenant is to pay the bulk of your tithe to this church, as you have committed to the work and ministry of this church as your primary participation in the local church of Jesus. Well, enough.

PP#6: When NOT to Give an Offering

1. How you spend your money is a spiritual vital sign
2. God frames money in terms of stewardship and generosity
3. Tithing: Giving back to God your first 10% earned
4. Your church is your ally
5. Neither God nor this church needs your money.

For my last point, I want to reinforce that neither God nor this church *needs* your money.

I mean that! Don't get sucked into thinking how important you are when you give. Our church's expressions of appreciation for the money that we give, although completely earnest and appropriate, can make us feel important and a bit like we are heroes. And then we start to think that the money we give ought to pull some weight, for we are seeking to give our money to what we identify as worthy causes. After a while of this, we develop a sense that we are doing God a pretty big favor when we give generously, and that God ought to be impressed, or at least appreciative. "Now His ministry can go forward!"

But you know what? No where in Scripture do I find where God is impressed with our generous giving, or...watch this...where God even appreciates our giving! Think about that a minute. God is neither impressed with nor appreciates of our giving. God never says, "Thank you!"

Why? Because that would be poison to us! He loves us too much to say that. We must never begin to think that God needs *our* money. It's already His! Instead, it is we who need the money, and that it is God who gives us what we need. We are the ones saying thank you!" God's highest affirmation is not to tell us "thank you," but instead calling us "faithful."

And this church doesn't need our money, either! That's right! This church does not need our money. All of us here today could decide to give nothing to this church next year. And if God wanted this church to continue, the money would still come in.

Instead, Scriptures shows that the need is on our part. We need to give it. God, in His great mercy, chooses to connect His work on earth with the giving of His people. He does this because He wants to lift us up and incorporate us into His work. Actually, God could accomplish His work much faster and more efficiently without our help. But for God it's not about efficiency, or even effectiveness, but about relationships. God offers to include us because it blesses us.

We have a need to give. Giving tones us into faithful discipleship. It is in giving that we are trained to stay properly focused in life...properly focused on God. It helps guard us against sliding into that ever-constant trap of becoming too connected to our money and our stuff. God knows our weakness in this. And because He loves us so much, He has provided the safety measure of voluntarily giving to His work. Giving keeps us mission-focused. Giving keeps us connected to God's work, for our own spiritual health's sakes. In fact, it is so critical that usually the very first indicator that we are getting off track spiritually is we are not giving as generously as we need for our own spiritual health. Look at your finances to see how you're doing spiritually.

PP#7: *Someone really excited to give money in the offering plate.*

So, to be fully truthful, at offering times, I really should stand up and say, "At this time, you will be pleased to know that this church has decided to allow you to give your tithes and offerings to God's work here." That is actually the true perspective. Changes things a bit, doesn't it? Pastor Andrew once heard a pastor say, "As far as you're concerned, the church could take your money, put it in a pile, and burned it!" It's about your need to give, not the church's use of that money (the responsibility to use God's money faithfully is on your church leadership). So, when we put our money in the offering plate, we should be saying, "O, thank you. Thank you so much! I'm so glad you'll take my monies. I just don't know what I'd do without you."

It is here that we finally get to our Scripture passage for today. I think in the history of sermons on money, this passage might never have been used...until now! It's a passage on murder! But in it, I think, we see Jesus' surprising view on giving. Turn to Matthew 5.

This passage comes right as Jesus is getting warmed up in His "Sermon on the Mount," in which He turns so many things upside down...or right side up, actually! And as He is trying to

explain how God is not after the outward form, but instead the inner heart, Jesus first talks about murder. And it is here, almost in passing, that we see God's view of financial offerings.

PP#8: Matthew 5:21-24 (CEB)

21 "You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, Don't commit murder, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, 'You idiot,' they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, 'You fool,' they will be in danger of fiery hell.

Let's begin reading at verse 21, "'You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, Don't commit murder, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, 'You idiot,' they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. But if they say, 'You fool,' they will be in danger of fiery hell.'"

So, murder is subject to civil judgement, but anyone who has unjust anger toward his neighbor is subject to God's judgement. See, even if you stay your hand, God knows your heart. You may not be tried before a judge, but you will be tried before God. Ouch!

Again, if you slander your neighbor, you can be brought to trial on earth. But if you are careful and only say negative things about him, but still have a lack of love for him, God sees it as equally bad. You may not end up in prison, but you will end up in hell! Ouch again!

PP#9: Matthew 5:21-24 (CEB)

23 Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift.

And it's right here that Jesus teaches on giving money. Let's pick it up again in verse 23. "'Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift.'"

So, what Jesus is saying is that if your neighbor has something against you, God doesn't want your offering. In fact, Jesus says, you are not even allowed to offer it! Do not give it! God doesn't need the money. God doesn't want the money. God wants your heart pure. Offering money is a way for you to keep your heart pure. But if there is something else in there, then offering your money will do you no good. So don't give it! Go and make amends, and then resume your healthy regimen of the giving of your money.

There are three important details to not miss. The first is that *you* have to remember the issue. Don't be worried about issues you aren't aware of. If it is important, the Holy Spirit will remind you. Deal with those things that you feel hanging on your heart.

Secondly, Jesus doesn't say you have to be guilty. He says, "if your brother has something against you." Even if you're innocent, if your neighbor is angry with you, you go and take the initiative and make amends. Why you? Because you are responsive to the Holy Spirit, and He can work through you.

And thirdly, notice Jesus says to leave your offering near the altar. You are not to offer it, but you are also *not to keep it*. Remember, the purpose of offerings are for our own good. For your own

good, don't take it with you...lest you be tempted to not give it, or lest you miss the blessing that comes from parting with your money.

PP#10: Isaiah 1:11

“The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the Lord. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in them.”

This may be an odd passage for money, but I found this principle all over Scripture. God is not after the offering. He is after the heart. The offering must be an outward expression of what is in the heart. A couple of quick examples. Psalm 40:6 “Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but” righteousness. Psalm 51:16 “...you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit...” Isaiah 1:11 “The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the Lord. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure” in them. Hosea 6:6 God again spews, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”

PP#11: When NOT to give? When you're heart's not in it!

So, I want to tell you not to give financial offerings....if your heart is not in it. If it is out of a sense of duty, or a belief that you in some way are helping God, or that you imagine that without you God's work won't get done, or that you need to keep this church going, or that by giving you somehow accomplish or earn something, then please *do not give!* If these are your reason for giving, then your giving does you no good.

And if your neighbor has something against you, stop and go do what you can to resolve it before you give. Write out the check and deduct it from your account, but don't put it in the offering plate until later. The church will survive without it.

But if your heart compels you to give, then, for your sake, this church will receive it. If you want to avoid the temptation that your money and possessions can be for you, then please, for your own sake, give. If you want to be a part of what God is doing in our world, then give. If you look ahead to next year and think through your finances, and you have a need and a desire to give, or perhaps give more, then please fill out your estimate of giving card and present it next week.

PP#12: *Image of a person with a bursting heart eager to give money.*

And if you realize your need to give exceeds what you feel your ability is to give, then it is time to become like the trusting widow in the Bible story earlier. If you really want to give it, God will find a way for you to give it, and still supply more than all your other needs.

I hope you can start to see how money can show you how you're doing in your faith. You can assess your spiritual health by looking at your finances. Commit to creating a track record of stewardship and generosity. You will find that you can give what is in your heart to give. That desire comes from God, and He will make it possible for you to give it.

“Each one should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Amen.

Offering and Closing Song: *New Doxology* -Sanctify

So, you will have noticed that we saved the offering time to after the message. That's because now it will make sense when I say to you, "In order to be a help to you, in order to be a blessing to you, this church has agreed to receive the monies that you so desperately need to give. And I know you want to say 'thank you' so badly when you give. So, we'll do that with a song of doxology!"

Memory Verse: -David

"Yield to God and be at peace with Him; in this way good will come to you." -Job 22:21

Announcements: - David

Wednesday meal & groups

Benediction: - David