

KEY TALKING POINTS OF REV. TIM'S FOURTH STEWARDSHIP SERMON – NOVEMBER 18, 2018

"DEFINED BY GENEROSITY"

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want. A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water. (Proverbs 11:24-25)

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)

A Theological Foundation for a Generous Life

Created to be generous, tempted to hoard

God created us with the willingness to give – to God and to others. This design is part of our makeup; we actually have the need to be generous. Yet there are two voices that work against our God-given impulse toward generosity and that tempt us to keep or hoard what we have.

- The voice of fear
Fear of what might happen to us, along with a misplaced idea about the true source of our security, keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. The truth is that hoarding offers us no real security in this world.
- The voice of self-gratification
Our culture tells us that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, *If I give, there won't be enough left for me.*

Defeating the voices

When we give our lives to Christ, invite him to be Lord, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to dissipate and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others. Although we still may wrestle with the voices from time to time, we are able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in Christ. And the more we grow in Christ, realizing that our lives belong to him, the more generous we become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth.

Biblical reasons to give to God and others

- "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)
- "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25)
- "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1)

Biblical guidelines for giving

From the early days of the Old Testament, God's people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the first fruits or the *tithe*, and it equaled one-tenth of one's flocks or crops or income. Abraham was the first to give a tithe or tenth.

- Genesis 14:20b
- Genesis 28:18-22

- Leviticus 27:30-33

Giving a tithe

As Christians who live under the new covenant, we are not bound by the law of Moses; we look to it as a guide. Yet most Christians agree that the tithe is a good guideline for our lives, and one that is pleasing to God. Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you cannot tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are and will help you make the adjustments necessary to become more generous.

Giving beyond the tithe

Tithing is a floor, not a ceiling. God calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We should strive to set aside an additional percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects, schools, church building funds, and nonprofit organizations.

What Our Giving Means to God

How does our giving affect God?

From the earliest biblical times, the primary way people worshiped God was by building an altar and offering the fruit of one's labors upon it to God. They would burn the sacrifice of an animal or grain as a way of expressing their gratitude, devotion, and desire to honor God. The scent of the offering was said to be pleasing to God. It wasn't that God loved the smell of burnt meat and grain. Rather, God saw that people were giving a gift that expressed love, faith, and the desire to please and honor God, and this moved God's heart. When given in this spirit, our offerings bless the Lord.

What is God's response to our giving?

- Luke 6:39
- Matthew 25:14-30

What Our Giving Means to Us

Through it our hearts are changed.

When we are generous – to God and to our families, friends, neighbors, and others who are in need – our hearts are filled with joy. They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous.

In it we find the blessing of God.

Many Christians have it wrong. They say if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that is not how it works. We do not give to God so that we can get something in return. The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back to us. Of course, there is no guarantee that if we tithe, we will never lose our job or never have other bad things happen to us. Nevertheless, when we give generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.

Closing Prayer

O God, we thank you that you have given us life, that you sustain us by the power of your Holy Spirit, and that you gave Jesus Christ as an offering for us and for our sins. We thank you for the abundance that we have in our lives. And we pray, O Lord, that you would help. Help us to care for the poor and those who are in need. Help us to recognize that it is more blessed to give than to receive. We offer ourselves to you. Guide us now as we prepare to fill out our commitment cards. Help us, O Lord, to do your will. Lead us, we pray. In your holy name. Amen.

Personal Goals and Commitment

ENOUGH STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

During the past few weeks, we have examined some of the financial challenges facing us as a nation, and we have looked at our own spending, saving, and giving habits. We have examined the biblical principles of financial management, and we have learned about ways to assess our financial situation and develop a financial plan that will allow us to experience the true joy that comes through simplicity and generosity. Now as we prepare for Consecration Sunday next week, I ask for God's blessing of my commitment to these financial goals for the upcoming year.

My Personal Goals and Commitment for 2019

1. I will thank God daily for all my blessings. My goal for daily Bible reading and prayer is __ days each week.
2. I will seek contentment and simplicity and live within my means. My spending goal is _____.
3. I will seek freedom from the bonds of credit and debt. My debt reduction goal is _____.
4. I will seek to wisely manage the gifts God has given me, investing and saving for the future. My saving goal is _____.
5. I will worship God each week by the giving of my tithes and offerings.

My Lord, I present this commitment to you, acknowledging that everything I have and everything I am is a gift from you. I pray that you will grant me wisdom and strength in the coming year, and that you will bless and use the gifts that I humbly present to you. Amen.

For personal use. Place in your Bible for reference in the coming year.