**Why Do We Give?**

**Proverbs 11:24-28; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9**

11/9/14

Theme: On top of supporting the local church and its ministry, there are at least two reasons we should give:

1. Giving shows our thankfulness to God for all that God has given to us;
2. Giving helps us grow in faith as we are forced to rely on God’s provision.

Thought for Meditation:

The stewardship question is not really how much will we give. The stewardship question is how we spend what we have been given. *Ann Weems*

One of the best tests of religion is to find yourself in church with nothing less than a $50 dollar bill in your wallet. *Unknown*

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 In the next day or so you should receive a stewardship letter from the church. There is a pledge card in the letter that we hope you will fill out and bring back to church next Sunday, which is Dedication Sunday. Today is Stewardship Sunday, which means that this is a stewardship sermon. Sometimes it’s called the tuberculosis sermon. I’m going to ask you to “cough it up.”

One pastor was talking with a man in his congregation. The man told his pastor “I want to tithe. I want to give 10 percent of my income to my church, but it’s hard. When I first started out in business I only made $50 a week, but I gave $5 to the church every Sunday. When I started becoming successful and my weekly income rose to $500 a week, I gave $50 to this church every Sunday. Then I started making $5,000 a week, and I really struggled with giving $500 every week. Now my business is really booming and I’m making $50,000 a week and I just can’t bring myself to give $5,000 to the church every week.” The pastor said, “Why don’t we pray about this?” The pastor began to pray, “Dear God, please return this man’s income to $500 a week so he can tithe…”

I know that as soon as the preacher says he is going to talk about money there is a natural tendency to tune out and prepare for a 20 minute nap. I’ve done it myself, though not normally during my own sermons. I’m also aware of the moral dilemma that every pastor faces when he or she preaches about money. The more you give to the church the better I look, and I know that my salary depends on your giving. I can’t change that dilemma.

Here is what I propose, before I get into this message. I want to give you two promises and one personal statement. The first promise is that I’m not going to focus on giving to the church. Whether you give all your offerings to the church or split it between a variety of places isn’t what really matters. It takes money to run the church – to pay salaries, to maintain the facilities, to pay for heat and lights, as well as to pay for the programs and the mission of the church as we share God’s love and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. You that, so I’m not going to emphasize that, but I don’t want to downplay that either.

The second promise is that this will be a short sermon. If you have tuned out and are preparing for a 20 minute nap, you are going to be disappointed. This sermon won’t be anywhere near that long. Finally, the personal statement is this; I don’t claim any moral superiority in the area of giving. I am tempted by materialism and money as much as anyone else.

In other words, I’m preaching to myself as much as I am to anyone else. With those three ideas in mind, let me share with you three reasons to give. Over the last two weeks we have heard two members of this church share a little bit of their own story, why they give. I want to thank both Ron Schermerhorn and Joe Udvari for their comments. Here are two reasons why I think it is important to give.

The forst reason that we she should give is that giving money is one of the best ways to show our thankfulness to God. I want you to fill in the next word for me. “God so loved the world that he **gave**.” Everything we have is a gift from God. He gave us everything – our family, our friends, our abilities, our material wealth, our salvation – all of it is from God. You and I can’t out give God. You will never give enough so that God owes you something. That is what grace is all about. Grace is the center of life and giving. We don’t give ***so that*** God will love us. We give ***because*** God loves us. Our giving is response to the fact that God has given us everything. Our giving is a way of saying “Thank you” to the One who has given himself to us.

In one of Max Lucado’s books he tells the story of the time he went to a coffee shop in Rio de Janeiro. Rio has an orphan population of hundreds of thousands of kids. To survive they have to steal or beg. One day as Max walked to a coffee shop a young boy tapped on his arm and said, “Pao, Senhor? - Bread, sir?” Max took the boy into the coffee shop, ordered a cup of coffee for himself, and something to eat for the boy. They boy looked up and down the counter and picked out a pastry. Normally these children who were begging would run off right away, but this little boy came back and said, “Obrigado - thank you.” He stood there, shuffling his feet, and again said, “Muy obrigado - thank you very much.” Then he ran out. Max was overwhelmed by this boy’s thankfulness. His heart was filled with joy. He wrote these words. “If I am so moved by a street orphan who says thank you for a piece of bread, how much more is God moved when I pause to thank him for saving my soul?” When we thank God, for both our blessings and our struggles, God is moved. God is filled with joy. Our giving is one of the best ways of saying thank you to God who has given so much to us.

The second reason why it is important to give is this – giving helps us to grow in our faith. In the Old Testament there was an offering called the firstfruits. When the first harvest of the year started coming in, probably in June, the people were called to take the first part of their crop, the firstfruits, and offer it to God. At the beginning of the harvest there is no guarantee that the rest of the harvest would be enough. It might be ruined, or fall short of what was needed, or something else might happen to it. To give the firstfruits of your crops was an act of faith, faith that God would provide.

The same principle can be found in the idea of giving God our best, not our leftovers. It is giving to God before you know you have enough. If your income is $50,000 a week, there isn’t much sacrifice in giving $100 a week to the church. You will still have enough left that you don’t need to worry about buying food, keeping the heat on, or paying for your vacations. However, when your income is only $20,000 a year, that is less than $400 per week, giving $100 a week is going to be a challenge. It takes incredible faith to give generously. When we give, when we give generously and sacrificially, we will grow in our faith, as we learn to trust in God.

Eugene Peterson tells the story of a family of swallows he saw one day. There was a mama and a papa bird, and three chicks who were just learning to fly. These three chicks were on a branch that stuck out over a lake. Mama stood right next to them, on the inside of the branch. She started edging her way out toward the end of the branch, pushing her chicks toward the end. The first one got to the end of the branch and fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water he stuck out his wings, and could fly. Mama kept pushing and the second chick fell off the branch. He stuck out his wings, and could fly. The third chick was stubborn. He really pushed back hard, but mama was bigger. The chick got right to the end, loosened his grip on the branch, twirled underneath the branch where mama couldn’t push him. Papa flew on to the branch and began to peck at his feet. He protested, but eventually let go, stuck out his wings, and began to fly. Then Peterson makes this amazing comment.

 “The mature swallow knew what the chick did not – that it would fly – that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

 Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But ***flying*** is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

 “***Giving*** is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth… some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don’t think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start, the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace.”

 Brothers and sisters, giving is what we were made to do. We give as a way to say thank you to God. We give to grow in our faith and trust in God, who gave us himself.

We give Thee but Thine own, Whate’er the gift may be;

All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee.