

Stewardship 2 – Generosity-based Living

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV)

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.



I will never forget the first time that I handed my grandmother her first great grandchild. She held the baby in her arms and smiled as she looked into his infant eyes. No other gift could have brought her the joy that she felt in holding that child. She did not close her eyes to soak in the feeling of the tiny baby and his soft skin. She smiled and spoke tenderly to him, holding him securely in her arms.

There is a natural rhythm in life of receiving and giving. They go hand in hand like a baby in a great-grandmother's arms.

Life that is truly life is a mixture of receiving and giving. And when that rhythm is out of balance and a person only receives, or predominantly receives, life is not truly life. Someone speaking graphically said that when a person only receives that they are spiritually and financially constipated. “We keep taking in, but we're not giving out. After a while, it becomes uncomfortable and causes us pain. Sometimes we may not even realize what is happening. We're taking in, but it is not satisfying because we were not made to take in and never give anything back we were created for generosity. Over time we become self-absorbed, money-consumed, joyless people. This is what a lifetime of financial and spiritual constipation looks like: joylessness.”¹

Contrast that with this. A family arrived at a town for a three-day vacation and the dad said to his children, “I'm going to give you \$20 but that's all I'm going to give you. You can spend it anyway you want, but you only have \$20. Later that day they went to a gift shop and in a short amount of time, one of his daughters showed her dad a hat wanted to buy it. It was a very nice hat but it would take the entire \$20. The dad did everything he could do to talk her out of spending her money so early in the trip, but she persisted. He gave her the \$20 and she bought the hat. They went on sightseeing throughout the day. That night, as they sat on the porch of their cabin, the daughter came up and gave the hat to her dad. She said, “here, Dad, I bought this hat for you. I love you. Happy Birthday.”² The dad says that that hat is one of his most cherished possessions, made more precious by the fact that his daughter used her money to buy it for him.

¹ Adam Hamilton, Enough, Abington Press, Nashville, 2009, p. 88

² Hamilton, p. 87

As natural as it is for a grandmother to love a baby and for that infant to give love back, so we were created for generosity and life that is truly life is generous.

Something happens to many people that interrupts that joy of giving to others. Likely it has two components and the first is fear. We are afraid that we won't have enough for ourselves. Misguided by where our real security is to be found we begin a habit of holding on to what we have.

The second factor that interrupts our generosity is self-gratification. There are many things that we would like to have. I have a perfectly good car and have had no major repairs – only routine maintenance issues, but yesterday I was driving and a shiny red car passed me and with no other provocation I began imagining what it would be like to own that car and drive it. Thoughts like that interrupt our nature to be generous.

It is good to say that the passage read this morning does not condemn wealth and it even says that God provides us with everything for our enjoyment. But there is a point when “an increasing amount of stuff produces a diminishing return of happiness and satisfaction”.³ If you have ever known someone who hoarded things, you sense how a person can become dominated by their things and that, while they may not see it, the quality of their life decreases.

How do we avoid the trappings of increasing stuff that decreases life and how do we have life that is truly life? We read in the book of Proverbs: “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.”⁴

Throughout Scripture God's people have given to God a tithe, or 10 percent of their income. On the pulpit today are 10 apples representing the wealth that God gives to you. 9 apples are there for your use: providing for your daily needs, caring for your family, setting aside something for retirement, but the 10th apple is holy to God and set aside as an expression of love to God.

The concept is not difficult to understand. We are to be generous and willing to share and in that way be rich in good deeds.

Remember the man whose daughter used her money as a gift for him? So must God be pleased to receive our tithe as an expression of our love.

We should not forget that generosity based living is pleasing to God and it changes us in positive ways.

In your stewardship packets you will find a colored tri-fold brochure with stories of what this church means to some of our members. Your generosity with the church has blessed others. It was your generosity in providing funds for the youth mission trips that enabled their experience that will be with them for a life time. As a result, some may choose careers that bless others.

³ Hamilton, p. 76

⁴ Proverbs 11:24-25



God created us for generosity and gives us an abundance of resources so that we may provide for every good work. Do not let fear rule your life, nor be so self-focused that you live a receiver-based life. God created us for receiving and giving. As Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Realizing what God does with our gifts to others, experience would agree.