

There's a common joke, and I think Andrew said it right after the recent confirmands confirmed their faith, that once someone joins the church, they are handed a pledge card. We don't do that because giving a tithe or an offering is a spiritual practice that is between you and God. But, vowing to support the church with our "Gifts" is included in our membership vows, and that is what we'll explore today. We've talked about the importance of our presence and our prayers. Now, we'll talk about the importance of giving our financial resources.

Practically speaking, it takes money to do ministry. God has called us together for a purpose -- to serve the Descanso community, the surrounding areas, and the world. In order to meet the needs of the community through programs and events, we need financial resources to make those programs happen. So, we give in order to do the work God has called us to do.

Theologically speaking, we give because God gives to us. God gives us the Word, truth, through Christ. God gives us new life over death. God gives us a "good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of the life that really is life," v.19. God gives and gives and gives. It's all gift every day. Every breath we take is a gift. The unrelenting forgiveness God gives is a gift. God's steadfast love and endless grace, especially when we don't deserve it, is pure gift. Everywhere we turn, there's a gift from God. God is so generous to us, so we, in turn, are generous to God.

Let's talk about what happens when we give and why it is important. When we give, we are worshipping God. As humans, we have an innate, built-in need to Worship. Here are some definitions of worship: "1. Reverent honor and homage paid to God or to any object regarded as sacred. 2. Adoring reverence or regarding:

an example is 'excessive worship of business success.' 3. To feel an adoring reverence or regard for (any person or thing)." <sup>1</sup> These definitions aren't taken from a theology or church worship book. These definitions come from a regular dictionary. These definitions tell us that if we don't worship God, we worship something else. And, what do we often worship in our consumerist and capitalist culture? Money.

Several months ago, one of the men who attend Senior Lunch asked me a question: "If the Bible says that money is evil, then why does the church ask for it?" The Bible doesn't say that money is evil. Money is actually good because it provides our basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Money is paper or metal that we attach value too. We attach feelings of adoration and reverence.

The Bible says that the love of money is the root of evil, because when we love money, to the point that it drives our life, that it consumes our every thought and action on how to get more of it, then we are worshipping money. When we love money more than God, we wander away from our faith (1 Timothy 6:10). That's when it becomes unhealthy. When we give our tithes and offerings, we are worshipping God. We give ourselves, our lives, and our worship through these concrete symbols. When we hold on to them, we put our faith in them. When we give, we put our faith in God.

It is also important to give because it grows our faith. We are called to share the good news and that can be done by sharing our resources with the needy. Verse 18 says we "are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share." We grow our faith by caring for the poor, the widows, the orphans, the marginalized. We

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/worship?s=t>

allow God to work through our resources. When we give, we grow our faith by mimicking God's generosity and following what God calls us to do.

I'm not talking about signing over your property or emptying your bank accounts. We need money to live. A wise principle to live by is the **10-10-80 principle**. From our income, we give 10 % to God, we save 10%, and we live off 80%.<sup>2</sup> God calls us to order our financial lives – just like all the other aspects of our lives – around our commitment to Christ.<sup>3</sup> When we take the membership vows, we commit all our lives. We don't hold back parts of it for ourselves.

To include our financial lives in our discipleship, John Wesley had 3 simple rules about money: 1. Gain all you can. Work for it. Don't expect that money will just fall in your lap. Wesley warned about slipping into laziness with that thinking. In Wesley's own words, he said, "Use all possible diligence in your calling. Lose no time...Never leave anything till tomorrow, which you can do today. And do it as well as possible...Put your whole strength to work...Let nothing be done by halves, or in a slight and careless manner."<sup>4</sup> Wesley had a fierce work ethic. But, he also put boundaries around this work ethic. He said to gain all you can "without hurting your health, without hurting your mind (lying, cheating, etc.), and without hurting your neighbor.

**The second rule is Save all you can.** It's fiscally smart to save for future expenses. In our culture of excess, we tend to hoard instead of save. I read about the story of Homer and Langley Collyer: "They were teenagers when their family moved

into the three-story brownstone on Fifth Avenue in New York in 1909, and that's where they died in 1947. An anonymous caller reported that there was a dead body in the house, but police were unable to get in because of the mountains of junk piled behind the doors. They broke in through a second-story window and found the entire house packed with stuff from wall to wall, floor to ceiling. Digging through tons of material, they found Homer's body. Almost three weeks later, they discovered Langley's body, crushed under one of the booby traps he had set to protect their possessions."<sup>5</sup> Mental illness was obviously part of this story, but this story shows how we store up our treasures here on earth. We allow our treasures to bury us and keep us from doing God's work.

Wesley wasn't really talking about hoarding because during the 1700's scarcity and poverty were prevalent in their culture. Wesley was warning against spending frivolously. Impulse spending, buying things we don't really need, and wasting our money on things that don't last. He grew up in poverty, but once he became an Oxford professor, he began to earn money. He was single and spent his money on playing cards, tobacco, and brandy. But, an incident changed that. He had just bought some pictures to decorate his room, when a chambermaid came to his room without a coat on a very cold day. The Holy Spirit spoke to him, to give her money to buy a coat, and he vowed to live a simple life after that.<sup>6</sup> We are trustees of the material blessings God gives us, so we should be good stewards by spending and saving wisely.

---

<sup>2</sup> James Harnish, *A Disciple's Path: Daily Workbook*, Kindle edition, location 1328.

<sup>3</sup> Harnish, location 1331.

<sup>4</sup> Harnish, *Companion Reader*, location 967.

<sup>5</sup> Location 1014.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1987/winter/8711027.html>

**The third rule is Give all you**

**can.** When we see a need, we give what we can. We have a generous spirit because God has a generous spirit. We have the desire, the willingness, to give because we are so thankful for God has given us. We want to give because it produces joy in sharing rather than hoarding, giving rather than taking.”<sup>7</sup> James Harnish said in *A Disciple’s Path*, “Our generosity is a finite response to the infinite generosity of God.”<sup>8</sup>

When we feel moved by the Holy Spirit to take the membership vows, we promise to support the church by giving our gifts because it's a tangible symbol that we're giving ourselves and all areas of our life. Giving is a spiritual practice that grows our faith by putting our trust in God instead of money. When we give, we join in God's work to redeem the world and bring about the kingdom of God where everyone is loved, everyone's needs are met, everyone shares God's grace, and everyone worships God.

Generous God, your love has no bounds.  
We think in scarcity; you give in abundance.  
We hold on to false security; you generously give a lasting foundation for the future. We worship other things in this world instead of putting our full trust and worship in you.  
Forgive us. Guard our hearts when we are tempted to put anything else before you.  
Move us to see the needs of people around us. Use us and our resources to do your life-changing work. Give us courage to be more like you. Thank you for the many blessings you have given us. We want to be good stewards of what you have entrusted us. In the name of the Son whom you so generously given, Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> Harnish, *Daily Workbook*, location 1125.

<sup>8</sup> Location 1125.