

“The Joy of Generosity”
September 23, 2018

God has given us a mission that we must not forsake. Everything we do (or don't do) must be determined by its alignment to this mission. The mission God has assigned to us is the same mission He's given to His church in every part of the world, to preach the gospel and make disciples (Matt 28).

The way we flesh out our mission here at Trinity is to say, *we exist to glorify God by loving Him with all of our hearts, delighting in His Word, and declaring His gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit for the transformation of lives in a vital and joyful union with Jesus Christ.*

If we only think of our mission as our general purpose, we will probably not be very effective. We have to make specific plans and goals to keep moving in the direction God has given us. (Illus: farming) This is why we have established a 2020 vision for the next few years of ministry, to be more proactive about advancing our mission.

With this 2020 vision we are encouraging each other to open our hearts, open our homes, and open the Word for those who need Christ. Opening our hearts includes praying for 20 new believers to respond to the gospel in the next few years. I encourage you to join us for prayer during adult Sunday School this year as we pray for God to be drawing many to Himself.

Opening our hearts also means gathering in Life Groups to study “Small Town Mission” this fall so that we can be more intentional about putting feet to our prayers. This will pave the way for us to not only open our homes and open the Word with each other, but also prepare for the next stage of welcoming unsaved friends to explore the Scriptures with us and be introduced to Christ.

Along with being more intentional about our mission, the 2020 vision also calls us to pray for God to provide the workers and resources we need to expand our facility—our home base. Shortly after this congregation was established, they discerned the need for a building to be the home base for their ministry. 2020 will be the 30 year anniversary of that building project.

Now, 30 years later, we have not only used every square inch of this facility hard every week, we also find ourselves in need of increased space for the ministry God has entrusted to us. But as you know building projects cost money and so we've been praying as well as encouraging you to give toward the goal of breaking ground in 2020.

Since we introduced the 2020 vision back in July, I have discovered that coming to a decision about what my family would contribute on a monthly basis to the 2020 vision was more difficult than I had expected. Next year we begin a 12 year journey of helping 4 kids through college which makes for a seemingly impossible financial situation. Many of you are in the same or similar kind of situation. So I'm guessing that the an intentional decision to support the 2020 vision is no easier for you than for us.

So this morning I want to take a one week detour from our study of Matthew to discuss the matter of stewardship as it relates to the life of discipleship—what might following Jesus in our finances look like? At the conclusion, of my message I am going to give you a brochure to aid you in the decision-making process as well as calling you to a particular challenge in the month of October.

Here's where I'm coming from. If we are going to take on a project that will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, we had better do some biblical thinking about it. [10 passages (brochure)]

So on one hand the building campaign is the catalyst for this message. It calls for some biblical thinking. On the other hand, this message is not driven by the building campaign in the sense that the message should be unchanging even if we didn't have a building project before us. Here's why. Stewardship is primarily a matter of discipleship (with or without a building campaign). ***Stewardship is more about the heart than it is about money.***

Stewardship is managing the resources God has entrusted to us in a way that honors Christ as Lord and reflects both the generosity of God's grace and His kingdom priorities.

The most important reasons for us to be generous in our giving have very little to do with the church's financial needs or goals. For example:

- **Stewardship is an act of faith** (I Tim 6:17).
The more I give, the less I have, the better position I am in to trust the Lord. This is why Timothy was to instruct those who are rich in this world not to “fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God” by being “generous and ready to share.”
- **Stewardship is an act of worship** (Phil 4:18).
In Philippians 4:18 Paul referred to the Philippians' ministry gift as “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” We give as unto the Lord, not as unto the church.
- **Stewardship is an act of discipleship** (Matt 6:24). Matt 6:24 says, “You cannot serve God and money. You have to choose one over the other. The only way for Christ to be Lord is for our financial decisions (and every other decision) to be subject to Christ.
- **Stewardship reveals your heart and what you treasure** (Matt 6:19-21). Jesus said, “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*”
- **Stewardship is a means to joy** (1 Chron 29; 2 Cor 8-9). As we are about to see, when both OT and NT believers gave generously and sacrificially as unto the Lord they had great joy! It sounds counter-intuitive, but we see it all over the Bible. *God gives joy to givers!*
- **Stewardship is a means of blessing** (Acts 20:35; Phil 4:17). To the Philippians, Paul said, “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account.” Paul was not timid about asking people to give because He knew it was for their own benefit too. “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
- **Stewardship both expresses gratitude and produces gratitude** (1 Chron 29:14; 2 Cor 9:10-11) as we will see in just a moment.
- **Stewardship is a reflection of the gospel** (2 Cor 8:9). “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (8:9) When we live or give sacrificially, we are living

out the spirit of the gospel (God's generosity came to us through the great sacrifice of Christ).

- **Stewardship honors God as God** (Psalm 24:1) “The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it.” God is the owner and we are but stewards and managers of His.

Thus, our generosity should not merely be motivated by ministry “needs” but by a heart of discipleship in response to God's grace and generosity in Christ.

What we have just seen indicates that being followers of Christ, growing as disciples, includes growing in generosity as good stewards of what God has entrusted to us. As we grow in faith, we should grow in our giving. So what might our growth in giving look like? What are the various stages of stewardship on the road of discipleship? Let me suggest 4 stages that we need to grow through:

1. **Faithful Giving**— *Gladly giving God the tithe (10%) of one's income* (Lev 27:30-34; Mal 3:8-10)

The tithe is a biblical principle established in Lev 27:30-34 in which God's people were to regard the first-fruits, the first 10% of their income as holy (set apart) unto the Lord. Generally the tithe was used to support the priests and the ministry of the temple. God had given His people the land, God had provided the seed and the rain, and so the people were to honor God with the first-fruits as a reminder that their prosperity was the result of God's undeserved grace.

Some may say, “But wait, isn't tithing an OT principle? Well, the first thing to note is that the principle of the tithe was never revoked by in the NT. More important, the overall message of the NT on giving suggests that we move in the direction of greater giving, not less, in response to greater grace.

John MacArthur put it this way: “*I can't tell you how much to give, but if the law required a 10% minimum, I would think that barely scratches the beginning of what grace deserves.*”

Randy Alcorn suggests that for NT believers, tithing is like training wheels. It's not meant to the extent of our giving, but it gets us started on a consistent discipline of stewardship.

God was so passionate about the tithe that it is the only means by which He told His people to test Him with their obedience. **Malachi 3:8-10:** *"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."*

This is not a get rich promise, but it means at least this much: You can afford to give, because God is a better giver. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" and He will take care of your needs (Mt 6:33).

What's most important is not how much you give but the heart with which you give it. In 2 Cor 9:7 Paul instructs each one to give as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver. So if you are not giving at all, the best place to begin is by giving what you can give cheerfully unto the Lord. If you are giving less than a tithe, I would encourage you to pray that God would give you the grace to joyfully give at least as much as was appropriate for OT saints.

2. **Generous Giving**—*Gladly giving beyond the tithe from one's remaining financial margin* (1 Chronicles 29)

The setting of 1 Chron 29 is King David collecting the resources to for his son Solomon to build the temple. What's so beautiful about this passage is that it is a passage of great generosity matched by great joy! Furthermore, this generosity and joy are result of God's unspeakable grace!

[vs. 1] There is a difference between the building of the temple and building a church. In the OT worship was centralized in the temple. All Jewish worship centered around the temple because it was

representative of God's presence. In the NT, worship has been decentralized. It is no longer focused on a single place. Now God's presence dwells in His people all over the earth. We are the temple. The people, the church, are a living temple. So we are not building a church. We are the church building a building. Yet there is a transferable principle we ought to take hold of—it is not for man but for God.

We don't need a building overlaid in gold and silver. *The beauty of God's glory and presence should flow from us, the living temple, not the building.* Yet its appropriate that as a place established as a sanctuary unto the Lord, it should be an attractive building, yet modest enough not to detract from the beauty of God's grace that should be flowing from us to one another. We don't want the building to detract from worship either by extravagance or unattractiveness. We want the building to simply enhance the beauty of worship we express for God's grace in Christ.

[vs. 2-8] David gives generously out of his delight for God. The people follow His example and also give generously and willingly.

[vs. 9] Generosity is matched with contagious joy!

[vs. 10-18] David responds with a prayer praise and thanksgiving that God allowed them to be so generous because God has been generous to them. From God's hand they give to the Lord. They are just sojourners who would have nothing to give had it not been for God's gracious generosity. ***Generous giving is a response to grace!***

Here we see the joy that comes out of willing and generous giving as a response to God's undeserved grace! David prays that God will preserve this heart in His people because ***their whole-hearted giving is simply a result of whole-hearted love for God.***

3. **Sacrificial Giving**—*Gladly giving by giving up (or delaying) something else* (2 Corinthians 8-9)

The context of 2 Cor 8 is that the Jerusalem saints are suffering from extreme poverty and Paul is writing to the Corinthians, seeking support on their behalf. He encourages them to follow the remarkable example of the Macedonian believers.

[8:1-5] Notice that the radical, joyful, generosity we see here is both a response to God's grace and a working of God's grace through them.

Vs. 2: AFFLICTION + JOY + POVERTY = GENEROSITY

In vs. 3, notice how the Macedonians progress from generous giving (according to their ability) to sacrificial giving (beyond their ability). They do this willingly (begging for Paul to let them give out of their poverty) by giving themselves first to the Lord and then to the saints. *What motivated them most was not just the need, or the appeal, but their love for Christ in response to God's grace.*

[9:6-12]

[9:8] God doesn't promise to make us wealthy, but He does promise to fill us with grace so that we can be free to be generous. ***If you give sacrificially you may not get the gift replaced, but you will get the grace to live without it. You can afford to be a generous giver, because God is a better giver, always ready to meet our needs. He gives gifts to givers, He gives joy to givers and He gives grace to givers!***

[9:11] God blesses you (is gracious and generous with you) so that you can be generous, so that God will receive generous praise!

There are at least 4 dominant themes throughout passages like these in the Bible: God's grace; Joyful generosity; Willingness of heart; Praise and thanksgiving to God. ***God's grace overflows from His people in glad-hearted generosity that results in praise and thanksgiving to God.***

So as we move from faithful giving to generous and sacrificial giving, there is an increasing intensity of joy. We can't do any of these three joyfully apart from God's grace (that's where the joy comes from), yet they still only capture what we can do. The last phase I want to introduce, takes into the realm of what only God can do, beyond what we can do.

4. Prayer—*praying for God's provision beyond our means* (John 14:13-14; 16:23-24)

All of our faithful, generous, and sacrificial giving will not be enough to accomplish all that is needed to fulfill our mission. We need to pray for God to provide. We need to pray with confidence in the God who provides manna in the wilderness, the God who provides water in the desert. The God who has promised to do great things in response to our prayers of faith.

John 14:13-14 – *“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in My name, I will do it.”*

John 16:23-24 – *“If you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you....ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”*

The greatest benefit of this whole process of pursuing the 2020 vision, will be the joy of seeing God work, doing what no amount of human effort can do. I want this so bad for you—I want you to see the greatness of God breaking through our little world in a way that will transform your faith and joy in Him.

I've given you a lot to process today, but where to do we begin? We can always pray, so let's not delay asking God to provide for us. But when it comes to our giving, the resourcing team felt it would be best to start from the beginning, so we can walk through these phases of discipleship together. So our team is asking you to take a step toward faithful giving by designating the month of October as a Tithe Experiment. In other words, we are encouraging every family to give a full tithe of their income in the month of October. Many of you are already there. For some, it will be a big step of faith to trust God to provide for you as you increase your giving to a tithe.

We are asking you to take this step of faith for one month. As you see God provide for you, then you can take further steps in the subsequent months.

You have two weeks before the first Sunday of October to pray for God to lead you in response to this challenge. We are committed to building debt-free. We are committed to not using manipulation to pressure people to give. But the one thing I will plead with you to do as you pray about your part, is to meditate on a series of passages that will help you process your decision through a biblical lens. Those passages are listed in a pamphlet the ushers will pass out during the last song (blue list).

Father, give us the joy of faithful, generous, and sacrificial giving. Give us the joy of seeing remarkable answers to prayer! Work through us to establish Your kingdom in the hearts of men and women, beyond what we could ever imagine!

****brochure**

October Tithe Experiment

A Step Toward Faithful Giving

We encourage you to prayerfully consider giving a full tithe (10%) of your income in the month of October. Why do we call it an experiment? Because it is an opportunity for you to take a first step in trusting God to meet your needs as you give to Him first.

As you pray about taking on the October Tithe Experiment, we strongly urge you to meditate on the following passages of Scripture for a more robust biblical perspective:

1. Exodus 25:1-9; 35:4-9, 20-29; 36:4-7 (Building the Tabernacle)
2. I Chronicles 29:1-20 (Building the Temple)
3. 2 Kings 12:1-12; 2 Chronicles 24:8-14 (Restoring the Temple)
4. Nehemiah 1:1—2:10 (Rebuilding walls of Jerusalem)
5. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; I Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 (Care for the Needy)
6. Philippians 4:10-20 (Missionary Support)
7. Exodus 15:22-27; 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13 (Water)
8. Exodus 16:1-21; Numbers 11 (Manna and Meat)
9. Deuteronomy 8 (Remember!)
10. Malachi 3:7-12; Haggai 1-2 (Bring the Tithe; Build My House)

Remember, *stewardship is about discipleship more than money*:

- Stewardship is an act of *faith* (I Tim 6:17).
- Stewardship is an act of *worship* (Phil 4:18).
- Stewardship is an act of *discipleship* (Matt 6:24).
- Stewardship reveals your *heart* and what you treasure
- Stewardship is a means to *joy*
- Stewardship is a means of *blessing* (Phil 4:17; Acts 20:35).
- Stewardship is an expression of *gratitude* (I Chron 29:14; 2 Cor 9:10-11).
- Stewardship is a reflection of the *gospel* (2 Cor 8:9).
- Stewardship *honors God as God* (Psalm 24:1)

Benefits of Tithing:

1. ***Tithing encourages a God-centered perspective.*** It reminds us that all we are and all we have is from God.
2. ***Tithing trains us to honor God as supreme in our lives.*** By honoring God first with our money, we recognize that He must have supremacy in all of life.
3. ***Tithing strengthens our faith.*** It enables us to express our dependence on God by giving to Him first and experiencing His faithfulness to provide.
4. ***Tithing gets us started with right habits.*** Tithing is a good first step toward a joyful life of generous and sacrificial giving as we learn to walk by faith.
5. ***Tithing enhances the ministry of your church.*** If you want a great church, strengthen the very body that ministers to you.

Common Objections to Tithing:

- ***Tithing is legalistic.*** Legalism is a heart problem. If you are struggling with legalism, don't throw out tithing; seek a change of heart.
- ***I'm too far in debt to tithe.*** From whom have you received more grace—your lending institution or God? Trust God to free you from debt by honoring Him with your finances.
- ***I can't afford to tithe.*** Can you afford not to? It's easier to live on 90% of your income trusting God than 100% of your income trusting your own earning ability.