

# “Giving Our Treasure Back to God”

October 21, 2018

*Treasure series*

## **SHOW MEDIA:** *Treasure Week 3*

Thinking about what I truly treasure has also made me think about special gifts that I've received. One story that came to mind happened when I was a freshman in college. I went to Grand Valley – about one hour and 45 minutes from home. One day, my dad made a surprise visit. He brought me goodies that I loved, and his drive was probably longer than his actual visit. His act of giving was a meaningful act of love for me.

This summer, I was thankful to hear Rev. Jeff Regan share about stewardship. He spoke to a group of clergy and reminded us of who we are as pastors called to lead and guide congregations. He said that, ultimately, when we talk about Christian stewardship, it's relational.

We begin with God's love (we love because God first loves us). We affirm God's ownership (everything belongs to God). We celebrate God's partnership in giving (God can do incredible things with our gifts), and we grow on God's hope (God can do more than we can ask or imagine).

This wasn't new information for me, but it was important to hear it again. So many times we start talking about stewardship and giving, and we immediately focus on ourselves. *What am I going to give? What should I do?* We become reactive. We forget to start with a focus on God, God's faithfulness to us, and God's call to give out of God's abundance. Yes, it's a relationship, and it starts with God's love.

We're using Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount to consider the condition of our hearts and how we're invested in God's work. We started with Jesus' warning not to store up treasures on earth, but rather *store up treasure in heaven*. And we faced the truth that even though we want our hearts to lead where our treasure goes, the reality is as Jesus says: *“Where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Jesus cares about our hearts. Today you received a card with that verse and a small key as a reminder.

Last week, Jesus reminded us that we *can't serve two masters*. Money is a tool for ministry. It funds mission and ministry here, nearby, and across the world! We serve either God or money - one or the other - but not both. New Testament writers warn that the love of money (not money itself) is the root of all kinds of evil. Money can serve God's purposes, but we can't allow it to control us.

Here are two quotes that help us, too:

### SHOW SLIDES:

- A simple fact that is hard to learn is that the time to save money is when you have some. – Joe Moore
- Don't tell me where your priorities are. Show me where you spend your money and I'll tell you what they are. James W. Frick

We can tell a lot by looking at our calendar and our checkbook or credit card statement. Where do we spend our time, energy, and money?

Today we hear Jesus offer a warning. He starts with “*Be careful...*” I say that a lot, mostly to my kids, and it's usually because I think there's potential for something bad to happen or something to go wrong.

Jesus warns not to be showy with our faith. *The Message* version puts it this way: “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding.”

This is ultimately about our hearts, and for Jesus, the heart was the place of true motivation. He goes on to give an example of giving to the poor. Notice he says, “Whenever you give...” not “If you give...” The expectation was that those listening would give and would care for the poor. He warns them that our giving isn't about getting recognition from others; it's about nurturing our relationship with God.

And Jesus says something similar about prayer: “When you pray...” not “If you pray...” Again the expectation is that prayer is a part of life with God. And the warning is the same. Gaining attention for ourselves when we pray isn't what it's about. That doesn't do anything to nurture our relationship with God.

I was convicted as I read these verses again. We may be those who fight the temptation for recognition and accolades. I know it feels good to be recognized, but the deeper issue is that the One who should receive attention from our relationship with God is God, not us. When we try to impress others or God, God isn't getting the glory. We want our lives to witness to God's grace.

We want to celebrate God and how God is faithful, loving, good, and gracious. We want to point people to God, not to us. We are not the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the universe; we worship the One who is! Jesus calls us to humility - remembering who we are and knowing that the reason we can give and pray at all is because of God's love.

And people can tell the difference. Maybe you've seen someone who wanted the spotlight or wanted to be the center of attention. When that desire shows itself in someone's faith life, and when faith is on display, there's a disconnect. It's not authentic or honest, and it hurts our witness.

The best witness we have is our true selves, and God uses us to draw people closer to God. Our journey of faith isn't a performance; it's really an act of worship. It's not about us; it's about God.

And when we talk about giving our time, money, and energy, we're talking about generosity - a part of God's character that we want to imitate. God is generous and calls us to be generous, willing to share what we have. And it's exciting to realize that we can be a part of something bigger.

**SHOW SLIDES:**

- Generosity is a practical expression of love. – Gary Inrig
- Generosity isn't about money; it's about the heart.

Our Missions team met this past week and celebrated God's generosity shown through this congregation. It wasn't one person who made it possible for us to walk beside a sister church in Zambia, but all of us investing and giving. God is good, and we give because of God's love!

It's exciting to join in the work of God, and we have the opportunity every day. Jesus links giving with spending time with God. Giving comes out of a relationship with God nurtured in prayer. We are beloved children of God who has given us an incredible gift in the grace that we experience in Jesus. God is an extravagant giver, and God calls us to give, too.

**SHOW SLIDES:**

- We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. – Winston Churchill
- The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away. – Pablo Picasso

There's a reward when we give, but it's different than what we might think. I hear a lot of people say, "My heart feels good" or "I feel good inside." The reward isn't something tangible; it's a sense of growing in humility and generosity - and feeling closer to God. The reward of giving away is much greater than the reward of holding on.

We give as a response to God's generosity. And when we invest in the things of God, we're a part of something bigger than ourselves. So I've asked myself some questions that I offer for all of us: what are we holding onto? What is God asking us to give away? How is God calling you to invest your time, energy, and resources for God's work?

I hope that you've received a Faith Commitment card in the mail. Some of you have made a faith commitment before - offering your prayers, presence, gifts, service,

and witness. If you have, you know the seriousness of it and the joy and blessing it is. I encourage you to continue.

And if you've been struggling to offer that faith commitment, to write it down and offer it as an act of faith and trust, I hope that this will be the time you decide to do it. We don't do it out of guilt or pressure, and I don't want you to. We do it as a response to God's love and faithfulness in our lives.

This is an important spiritual discipline, and I can testify to how this practice has made me more aware of God's goodness and grace in my life. It reminds me that I'm a part of something bigger than myself - and that my gifts make a difference.

The same is true for all of us! Your prayers matter. I hear it all the time from people when I say that they were prayed for by our church family. "I can feel it," they say. Showing up matters because it's a witness that worship forms your life, and being connected to one another is vital.

Offering your gifts matters. We want to be generous people. We want to give, and yet we struggle to give to God first. I can tell you in 18 years of ministry, I've never had one person tell me they were sorry they made a commitment to take a step in giving and working up to tithing. I've had many people tell me that tithing - giving ten percent to God first - made an incredible impact and helped them put priorities in line.

When we think of giving in the church, it's incredible to consider what we can do together when we offer our gifts - care for our space as a place for ministry, support ministries for all ages, partner with Ross Park in helping our community, nurture children in Christ's love, and so much more! Giving impacts us and our families, our community, and our world.

Your service to God matters - whether you offer your time to plan worship, care for this building, plan and prepare lessons to teach, dream about new ways to reach out, help us understand all of the opportunities to support missions, feed the hungry, clothe people in need, help the hurting, and more.

And your witness matters. I appreciate Jim reminding us that the way we treat others here and outside of these walls has a significant impact and may be the only example of Christian love they know. Speaking face-to-face, texting, sending E-mails, or using social media are all a reflection of God's love and grace in our lives.

The investments we make for the work of God matters, and it's amazing to consider what we can do together. May God help us open our hearts to God's leading and make a commitment to join in God's work in the world - right here and now.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: I want to be "all in" and serve you. Help me not to hold back, but to offer you my heart.**