

Find Joy - In Stewardship

Today we are wrapping up the series “Find Joy” studying the letter to the Philippians. As we have worked through this letter that Paul wrote to the church from prison, we see that ultimately you really can find joy in ALL situations if that source of that joy is Jesus.

To close this letter Paul praises the church for their continuing stewardship. Stewardship is really a bible word. You don’t hear it in normal, daily conversation but I sure wish we did...

A steward is one who manages another’s property of financial affairs.

Psalm 24:1 (NKJV)

The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.

So if you are a follower of Jesus...you’d say you belong to Him, right?

Think of some of the things we say:

- I gave my life to Jesus
- Everything I am is Yours
- He is my Lord, my provider

So if I belong to Jesus, and He is my provider...gives me all I need in life. He’s the master and the source. Then clearly, and biblically, I am a steward. What I have is actually HIS and He has given it to me to manage.

Now I know someone is already sweating this one out...here we go...a sermon about money. Well, yes and no. It’s much more than that. And it’s important. Jesus taught about money around 25% of the time...I don’t think He would if it weren’t important.

At Connection Church, we DO believe in biblical tithing which started back in the OT (before the law). Tithe means a tenth or 10% and this was to be done **first** and with your **best**. It was given to the Levite priestly ministry to fund God’s work. And they also had several other regular offerings and provisions on top of that. (about 25% of their gross income)

Today people like to say that since Jesus fulfilled the law, we are under grace giving. I love that idea...because here’s the thing...first, remember tithing was before the law. But secondly, if you look at all of the things under grace in the new covenant, it does not ever take a step backwards from OT obedience.

OT - don’t murder

NT - if you hate your brother you commit murder in your **heart**.

OT - don't commit adultery

NT - if you lust after someone you commit adultery in your **heart**

OT - give 10% of all your gain to the (priests) church for the work of God

NT - give sacrificially, regularly, cheerfully, and proportionally (it's about your **heart**)

If 10% was the OT requirement then now under grace that would be the baseline (minimum) that all giving would be based on. (*****tipping illustration**)

So start there with the tithe then with grace giving, you add:

- sacrifice (does it hurt, stretch you)
- regularity (do you do it consistently)
- cheerfully (with joy, gladness, knowing you are being obedient but also that God is going to do amazing things with it)
- proportionally (the more you are given, the more you give/bless)

Read through 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 this week for more reflection on those.

Now, I don't know who tithes and who doesn't. And it's not between me and you but you and God. I know God does and will provide for this church because it's His. I do know how tithing has blessed my life and I also know that even if I get nothing in return, God honors obedience. Plus I really believe it's all His anyway. I'm a steward, managing God's money. (*****tithe sermon**)

I share all of this to say, the church in Phillipi had it down. They were a very giving church and they represented a very giving God very well.

We serve a God who gave His Son, and now through Jesus, He gives forgiveness, new life, joy, peace, healing, restoration, victory, provision...

And these people got that...here's something you might not have known...they were not just all wealthy people. They would have been like us. Some doing all right, some struggling and everything in between. But they got the concept of stewardship.

It's not about "are you rich or poor", but about how you view and handle your money and possessions.

Philippians 4:10 (NKJV)

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

Stewardship starts with your heart. The people are sending Paul people and gifts and finances and they've been wanting to but there hasn't been opportunity!

People helped with what they had, when they were made aware of the need. I think this is the heart of many in the church. The heart is there, but your waiting for opportunities to arise.

A steward's heart would say "God has blessed me and when there is a need, I'm going to help"

Philippians 4:11-13 (NKJV)

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

If you are going to find joy in stewardship...you have got to be content. How many of you have got that down?

Notice what Paul said? I **LEARNED** to be content (by experience), contentment does not come naturally to us

To be content is to be fulfilled, to be satisfied. But when you look back to the Greek wording it took it a step further and meant "self-contained". And if you are self-contained then you contain in yourself all that is necessary.

That's the Holy Spirit in you. If you are born again you actually have all you need for joy and contentment, right inside of you. Knowing you belong to Jesus. That the Holy Spirit is with you...the great teacher, counselor, guide...

Paul was happy they were providing for him again, that they have this opportunity...but NOT because he has need...because he has learned that he can be satisfied with what he has in God...no matter what money or possessions he has...

He knows how to have little and how to have more than enough. He's been full and hungry. And those are not the things that **bring** him joy or **steal** his joy. It's life with Jesus!

Contentment is not just for the poor. We have this false thinking that it's just for the people that can't afford what they want. This applies to you even if you can afford it because just because you can afford it doesn't mean you need it. Be a good steward. Is it what God would want you to do with His resources that you manage?

Contentment is also not just getting rid of everything and having nothing. This is the point, it's not about what you have and don't have. It's a learned mindset along with a heart change to be satisfied in Christ. That the Holy Spirit is a resident inside of you...what more could you want?

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Here's a verse we use out of context for our benefit. I do have to say this verse does stand alone. It's still true that way. It's a biblical statement. But when we read this in context...it's saying that I can be strong (content) both when I don't have much and when I have a lot.

God will put power IN me...to sustain me. That's all I NEED...

Philippians 4:14-16 (NKJV)

Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

These people have always been generous givers. They've always given faithfully. And it's not always been easy...

If you look over in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul speaks of the churches of Macedonia (where Phillipi is located) and it says "During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."

Don't be fooled into making that deal with God. You know the one "when I make more, I'll give more", or "if I get rich, then I'll be a good steward" or "when I get out of this tough spot, then I'll start or get back on track". The truth is if you are a poor steward with a little, you will be with a lot.

Stewardship really isn't a numbers issue it's a heart issue.

In Mark 12 we see the account of the widow with two mites. All of the rich people are putting their money in the box, it says they gave MUCH and this poor widow comes and gives two mites.

A mite was the smallest denomination of the coins. So like a penny to us. But percentage wise it would be more like someone putting in a dollar today. Still, little in amount.

But Jesus said she gave more than ALL who had given because they gave out of their abundance but she gave out of her poverty, she put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.

\$1 when others are giving hundreds...whatever you have...if you can just learn contentment, be satisfied in Christ, cultivate a giving heart.

Some people are just takers, that is what they do. And if they do give it's as little as possible. And many of them continue to suffer and have need and they ask why...

There are parables about this. God gives more to the ones who are faithful with what they have been given. I'm not preaching the "give \$10 today and get back \$1000 next month message"...that's a promise I can't make. But I can promise that our God rewards obedience, faithfulness and generosity.

Philippians 4:17 (NKJV)

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

The bible uses a lot of gardening/farming terms doesn't it? Paul isn't seeking their money or stuff. I'm not seeking YOUR money or stuff. It's for YOUR benefit...We seek the FRUIT that abounds to your account...we want you to be blessed...and not just with money

When you give, you are earning eternal dividends. Sowing and reaping is a spiritual law...

Proverbs 11:24-25 (NKJV)

There is one who scatters, yet increases more;
And there is one who withholds more than is right,
But it leads to poverty.
25 The generous soul will be made rich,
And he who waters will also be watered himself.

Some call this karma, God calls it sowing and reaping. And look at how it's viewed by God.

Philippians 4:18 (NKJV)

Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a **sweet-smelling aroma**, an **acceptable sacrifice**, **well pleasing to God**.

What does this sound like? These are very familiar terms...

This is how the OT sacrifices were described when the people gave their first and best to God. But when they did it with the right attitude. It's not just the action but the heart behind it. This was received as worship...sweet smelling aroma, acceptable, well pleasing to God...

You have 2 choices: worship your money or worship with your money...in Matthew 6:24, Jesus said "pick one, you can't serve them both".

To some of you, it may be strange to step down here and give during tithe and offering time. We do this in the midst of worship and have you bring it down because we believe that it IS WORSHIP to present that to Jesus.

And look at how He responds:

Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

WOW...supply all your need, literally means to FILL UP. It's not the minimum but He will provide the fullness of your need and He does it from HIS riches...

The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness

Some of you are wondering why your needs are not being met. Why am I struggling? Why isn't God providing.

Are you being a good steward? Because this promise is for good stewards.

It's not a promise that if you live beyond your means and have stuff you can't afford and are a taker and not a giver, that God will continually bail you out...that's not what Paul is saying.

And he's not saying that if you give X you will receive Y. He's saying that if you take care of God's things, God will take care of you. Your NEEDS will be met. It's a spiritual law and promise and it comes from the riches of heaven of which there is no limit because that well never runs dry!

You can find joy in being a steward. God entrusted those resources to you so that you could use them for your needs and to do His work. Work that was laid out for you before you were even created. He promises to take care of good stewards.

And MY GOD is faithful to His word!

Philippians 4:20 (NKJV)

Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.