

STEWARDSHIP PART II

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Last week we embarked on a two-part series on the important subject of stewardship.

We began by examining the dictionary definition of stewardship:

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Stewardship is the job of supervising or taking care of something, such as an organization or property.

We went on to see that from the earliest pages of Genesis God charged his human creation with the stewardship of the planet.

Then we studied the parable that Jesus taught his followers in Luke chapter nineteen.

A parable where three servants were given money to invest with the expectation of their master that they would be obedient and, that there would be a return on his investment.

We believe that this parable was intended to teach us that God provides each of us a wide range of resources such as time, skills, energy, wisdom, and money to name just a few.

The type and quantity of resources for each one of us varies, but Gods investments in us equip us to carry out the plans that he has for us.

The parable teaches us that God expects us to use what he has provided wisely and that there is coming a time of accountability.

Today I want to spend our time giving some thought as to how we should develop and implement our own personal giving plan for the Lord's work.

Once again, my motive today is not to browbeat or intimidate anyone but to simply study together some valuable scriptural principles on how we are encouraged to manage the monetary resources God has intrusted to us.

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Last week one of the verses we left with you to ponder was this one from Proverbs 3 9&10:

Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So, shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

The first principles we shall look at today come from three important points embedded in this simplistic but critically important scripture.

The first one comes from the opening words; “Honour the Lord”.

At some point in time, we came to Jesus. We got saved, became converted, we came to Christ, whatever terminology you prefer.

And subsequent to that, we developed a personal giving philosophy. We may have been influenced by more mature believers, by pastors, and hopefully by the scriptures. We may modify it as we grow in the Lord, or as life circumstances change, or as God leads through his Holy Spirit but every believer should have a personal giving philosophy.

But the underlying key principle of our giving philosophy is that it brings honor to the Lord.

All the other scriptural principles we will talk about this morning must confirm with the need to develop a giving philosophy that honors the Lord.

The second principle that we see in our first scripture is found in two simple but profound words: “first fruits”.

The economy of that day was very much one of agriculture. Produce was the money of that time. And the key point is that the first fruits were the best fruits.

In order to honor the Lord, our giving philosophy must be one where we put our gifts and giving to the Lord as a top priority in the financial management of our affairs.

In the Old Testament, Leviticus Chapter one as an example, you will see that the animals offered as sin offerings had to be without blemish, the best from the herd.

The term ‘first fruits’ appears about thirty times in the King James translation. Obviously, it was an important principle. Here is just one example

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II Chronicles 31:5 (KJV)

And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly.

So, we can honor the Lord by making sure whatever we have concluded that we will give to the Lord financially is prioritized. We put it first in our financial obligations.

That's why I like the automatic deductions that are available from some banks. You can program your deduction to come out as soon as your income arrives before you make other payments. And thus the Lord receives the first fruits of your income.

And of course if that feature is not available you can set up your checks or even your cash donations to the Lord before your other expenditures.

By doing so, to use a vernacular phrase you are putting your money where your mouth is and on a regular basis saying to the Lord, you are first in my life and I will honour your first fruits principle.

But we don't do this other urgent stuff will invariably come in and we will end up giving to the Lord out of what's left over a situation which invalidates both principles of bringing honor to the Lord and first fruits giving.

Now the third key point from our first reading is not so much a principle as it is a promise.

To the believers of Solomon's day and subsequently to us God promises to bless those who have a God Honouring first fruits giving philosophy.

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So, shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

And from the Lord himself in Luke 8:38(NLT)

Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.

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So to this point we have three principles:

- 1) Honour the Lord
- 2) First fruits or only the best priority
- 3) Promise of blessing.

The fourth principle in building a giving philosophy is that our giving to the Lord is personal and confidential.

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In Matthew chapter six verses three and four (NLT) Jesus says:

But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

At the end of the day. When you have studied the scriptures and prayed over them, and when you have allowed the Holy Spirit to speak to you through them you will have developed your own personal giving philosophy.

This is a personal matter, a personal commitment between you and God. Nobody else needs to know.

The one exception to that is if you wish a receipt for tax purposes then you can choose if you wish to let the person who prepares these receipts know how much you give. And that option exists here at CCC and the people who handle that task are sworn to secrecy.

I don't need to know, don't want to know, the board doesn't need to know, God knows, your accountability is to him and to him alone.

And you can review your giving philosophy with the Holy Spirit on a regular basis to ensure you are comfortable with it.

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Personal Giving Principles

- 1) Honour the Lord
- 2) First fruits or only the best priority
- 3) Promise of blessing.
- 4) Personal and Confidential

The next principle is one I call the He owns it all mentality.

Remember for a moment the parable from last week's study. The servants were not investing their own money, they were investing their master's.

We tend to forget that God owns it all. It is not ours. He gives us life, he gives us breath, he gives us energy, he gives us strength, he gives us money, everything we have and enjoy comes from the hand of the Lord.

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Consider: Psalm fifty verses ten to twelve:
(NLT)

“For all the animals of the forest are mine, and I own the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird on the mountains, and all the animals of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for all the world is mine and everything in it.”

The point here is that we must develop a mindset that biblical stewardship is not about managing our stuff it is about managing his.

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Personal Giving Principles

- 1) Honour the Lord
- 2) First fruits or only the best priority
- 3) Promise of blessing.
- 4) Personal and Confidential
- 5) He owns it all

The sixth principle is more of a question. A question that many ask, how much?

First if all the issue is not how much in terms of dollars and cents. The issue is how well do we align with scriptural principles is our giving philosophy.

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In Mark chapter twelve verse forty-two (NLT) Jesus makes the point for us:

Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions.

The two small coins would have had little or no effect on the temple budget. The 'how much' was not the issue. The 'how' was the issue. How the woman's heart had responded to the need.

The next principle for consideration is the recognition the Lord has allocated some with more than others when it comes to financial resources.

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In II Corinthians Chapter eight verses eleven and twelve (NLT) Paul writes:

Let the eagerness you showed in the beginning be matched now by your giving. Give in proportion to what you have. 12 Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have.

God knows what you have. You can be assured that when you pray in developing your giving plan the Holy Spirit will not ask you for money you don't have.

In addressing the 'how much' question there has been much in the way teaching and preaching over the years that has focused almost exclusively on the Old Testament law of the tithe.

That law, and I emphasize the word law. The law of the tithe clearly called for every follower of Jehovah to take the first ten per cent of their income and present it for the Lord's work.

It was clearly one of the many laws for the Jewish people that characterized the Old Testament age.

For many years this law of the tithe was presented, taught and preached as not only law for the Old Testament age, but also law for the New Testament believer.

This emphasis had to a very large degree its desired effect. Generations of Christians religiously tithed and many perhaps most evangelical Christians still faithfully tithe. And many give offerings well over and above the ten per cent rule.

And that is not a bad thing, it is a good thing as long as it is not done because of pressure and intimidation

My mom and dad have long since passed on and so I can safely use them as an example. They were taught and believed that the law of tithing applied to them.

We had a small mixed farm. A few cows, a few pigs, a few chickens, a few beef cattle and a few logs from the bush when the going got tough. When the milk check arrived under the lid of an empty milk can the check was cashed and ten per cent

went immediately into the tin box in the cupboard that was simply called the tithe box.

When the egg money came in cash, in a little brown envelope with driver who was picking up the next egg shipment, the tenth part of that went immediately to the tin box. There was no thought of subtracting from those incomes the cost of producing the milk, eggs, or cattle. There was no thought of after tax or before tax. It was a very simple mathematical calculation that fed the tin box.

When special needs were identified, missionaries for example mom and dad would do their best to present an offering over and above their tithe

Tithing in general teaches some additional principles about Honoring the Lord with our giving.

First it shows that God's people were expected to give a significant portion of their income to God's work.

Secondly because it was a percentage rather than an absolute quantity it worked well regardless of one's income.

Thirdly, it called for practicing giving on a regular basis. When income arrived, giving took place.

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Paul embraced this principle in I Corinthians chapter sixteen verses one and two (NLT):

Now regarding your question about the money being collected for God's people in Jerusalem. You should follow the same procedure I gave to the churches in Galatia. On the first day of each week, you should each put aside a portion of the money you have earned. Don't wait until I get there and then try to collect it all at once.

So, the law of the tithe provides us with some good guidelines in developing our giving philosophy.

We can choose to work into our giving plan a significant amount of our income and commit to giving regularly.

But we need to be careful if we begin to see this as a rigid law that New Testament believers should follow.

If we believe that this is a legal requirement that applies to New Testament believers, then what about all the other OT laws?

For example, should we stop lighting fires in our homes on Sabbath days?

Secondly, when someone is pressured to respond to a rule or a law, the response tends to be done grudgingly.

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This flies in opposition to Paul's teaching in II Corinthians 9:7(NLT)

You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

Thirdly, intimidation, beating believers over the head with the law of the tithe may provide short term finances but violates the principle of giving generously.

Fourthly, when we approach issues such as this from a legal perspective, rather than a product of a changed and transformed heart we will find the same result as what transpired from the Old Testament legal system and our own secular laws

People look for loopholes and excuses. Is the tithe calculation before or after tax? What about my CPP payments and the list goes on.

The generous giver who develops a giving plan that honors God in concert with the Holy Spirit avoids these pitfalls.

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So now we can add to our list of principles or considerations in developing our personal and giving philosophy.

- 1) Honour the Lord
- 2) First fruits or only the best priority
- 3) Promise of blessing.
- 4) Personal and Confidential
- 5) He owns it all
- 6) We give according to what we have
- 7) Regular Giving
- 8) A substantial part of income

Now this afternoon at our business meeting we will present our budget view for 2023. I think it will be a challenging year.

As your pastor, I believe that God wants this ministry to continue here in Chesley.

And not just to survive but thrive. And surviving and thriving takes money. And we must not fall into the trap of only looking inward and thinking we are saving money by only spending inward.

That is a recipe for oblivion. So here is my philosophy on how we meet the needs of the ministry going forward.

First, let me say that during my entire tenure here my basic giving policy has been consistent. We unashamedly outline needs associated with the direction that we believe the Lord would have us go.

So how will we meet the financial challenges facing us in 2023?

I believe that if everyone who considers themselves to be a part of this ministry develops through prayer and the leading of the Spirit a giving philosophy that Honors the Lord based on the scriptural principles that we have studied this morning every need will be met.

The bible encourages us to focus more on spiritual investing and less on secular spending...

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Listen to Matthew 6:19&20 (NLT)

“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.

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