

Daily Devotional Guide

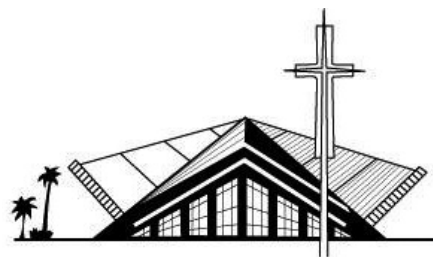
Monday – Read 2nd Corinthians 9:6. In this verse Paul is describing a fundamental law in the universe which God created. Like the law of gravity, this law never fails. This law is described in many ways. Its simplest expression is “You reap what you sow.” Whatever you give away will come back to you. If you give generously, generosity will come back to you. If you give sparingly, very little will come back to you. Now, we don’t give in the name of God with the intention of getting something in return. However, when we keep giving, God will keep giving back to us. Why? Read further in the devotional guide. For today, reflect on your giving habits. Do you give sparingly or generously?

Tuesday – Read 2nd Corinthians 9:7. Paul is speaking of two important aspects of our giving to God: commitment and attitude. Paul reminds us that we need to give what we have decided in our hearts to give. In other words, we must be true to our giving commitments to God. When we pledge an amount to God and His church, we must do all we can to make good on that commitment. Secondly, Paul tells us that God “loves a cheerful giver.” Why? God is cheerful when God gives. We are never more like God than when we are generous. We were made by a generous God to be generous. A cheerful giver “gets this.” A cheerful giver has discovered the profound joy in reflecting God’s generosity. Are you a cheerful giver?

Wednesday – Read 2nd Corinthians 9:8-9. In these verses Paul shares why God always returns to us what we have given. When we give generously, God gives back to us generously so that we will continue to give generously. Did you catch that? What you give will come back to you so that you can continue to give. Generous people never lack for anything. Why? Because God is always giving back to them and they keep giving. Paul used the phrase, “having all you need.” This means generous people have discovered that they really have very few needs and this frees up many of their resources for the purpose of giving. “The richest people are those with the fewest needs.”

Thursday – Read 2nd Corinthians 9:10. This is an exciting verse which describes God’s law of increasing returns. When you give consistently and generously, God will increase your power to give! Not only will God provide you with more resources to give (“store of seed”) but God will increase your capacity to give (“harvest of your righteousness”). It is true that the more you love the more God gives you a greater capacity to love. This goes for anything good that you give away. God will always increase our capacity to be generous.

Friday – Read 2nd Corinthians 9:11. The first part of this verse is a simplified expression of the meaning of this entire text. However, the last part of the verse describes the best part of our giving. When we give generously, God is praised. Our generous giving leads others to be thankful to God. We live in a selfish world and whenever selfishness is overcome by generosity the world takes notice. Giving is a powerful way to witness to God.



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Extravagant Living Giving From the Heart

Sunday, October 23, 2011

Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor
Scripture Lesson: 2nd Corinthians 9:6-11

One of my favorite jokes is about the one dollar bill talking to the twenty dollar bill. The one dollar said to the twenty dollar, "Hey, where've you been? I haven't seen you around here much." The twenty answered, "I've been hanging out at the casinos, went on a cruise and did the rounds of the ship, back to the United States for a while, went to a couple of baseball games, to the mall, that kind of stuff. How about you?" The one dollar bill said, "You know, same old stuff ... church, church, church."

This joke reminds me of another story about the man who had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. He could receive little company and was not to be excited. While in the hospital a rich uncle died and left him 10 million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. It was decided to ask the preacher if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The preacher went and gradually led up to the question. The preacher asked the patient what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, "I think I would give half of it to the church." The preacher gasped and fainted next to the bed.

Well, I think I would have fainted too! But the truth of the matter is that this kind of generosity should not surprise any of us if we take what Paul is telling us today seriously. For Paul makes it very clear in our passage that when we give, not only do we meet the needs of others, but we bring honor and glory to God! What's more is that the more we give the more God gives us the capacity to give. If we are connected to our loving God, extravagant generosity will flow freely from us. "Cheerful giving" in our text

literally means giving with reckless abandon.

Allow me to back up and get back to WHY - Why we should give generously to God and His church. Remember I said last week that why is a question of the heart. When people know why they should give, they give from the heart.

Last week I began our stewardship campaign with a big WHY. We should give because the church is God's best hope for the world. I want to add to the list of why's today. For I owe it to you to tell you why it is important to give. And you owe it to others who ask you to tell them why they should give.

Why Should We Give? When the World is at its Worst, the Church Needs to Be at its Best

This time of year I get moans and groans from a few people. They ask if I am going to talk about money from the pulpit again. A couple of people have asked me, "Are you really going to preach on money in this economy?" My response: "You better believe it!" You see, when the world is at its worst, the church needs to be at its best. Now more than ever people need God and the church! So we need to be sure the church is at its best!

Many people have the wrong picture of the church. They see it as this big cruise liner just coasting along catering to everyone's desires. What someone wants, they get. If someone complains, they are pacified. This is not the church! The church is not a cruise ship catering to people. The church is a battleship battling evil and transforming the world. We are a supply ship for the spiritually needy. We are a medical ship healing the broken and saving the lost!

People complain when money is mentioned “from the pulpit, but I don’t apologize for it. I am glad to be part of the body of Christ that needs your money and mine! Because we give, lives are changed! If we don’t give, the hungry don’t get fed, the naked don’t get clothed, and missionaries can’t tell others about Jesus. If we don’t give, children and adults do not get the curriculum and literature they need to grow in the faith! If we don’t give, the lights are not on for worship!

Every year I get a couple of people who say to me, “I brought my friend to church and you spoke about money! Why didn’t you preach about love or prayer?” My response is always the same. “I am glad your friend came when I was preaching about stewardship. Now they really know what kind of a church we are. They know we are a generous church - that we care about the church enough to give our resources and gifts. For how can we be a generous church unless the preacher talks about being generous?”

I also tell them that their friends now know we believe in the Bible and we preach the entire Bible, not just the parts we like.

We talk a lot about believing in the Bible and being biblical. Well, if we want the gospel preached, we have to hear the whole gospel, not just the parts we like. And the gospel consists of God, sin, salvation, and stewardship.

Everyone likes to come to church when the preacher talks about the first three, but not everyone likes to come when stewardship is preached. I find this fascinating because when schools, universities and charities ask for money most people don’t have a problem with it. But when the church, the most important institution in the world, begins asking for money some people get upset.

This is ironic because Jesus talked more about stewardship than he did anything else! Just read through the gospels and you will see for yourself. Jesus preached more about money and stewardship than he did prayer, heaven and sin.

One of the most important ingredients of the Christian life is faithful, committed stewardship to God’s church. When the Bible says “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,” the writer of Malachi knew that these rural people understood that the storehouse was the place on the side of the temple where the agricultural commodities were kept. It meant for God’s people to bring their tithes and place them in the storehouse, and they would be dispersed from there to the places of need.

The modern church finds itself at a time when this biblical doctrine needs to be underscored. It is not a

matter of raising money; it is a matter of raising Christians. Bill Self puts it this way, “If God’s people would tithe to the storehouse, then all the other causes that drain God’s money could be properly cared for. But instead, God’s church is placed in a position where it has to stand in line as ‘just another charity.’ The church of the LORD God is not ‘just another charity;’ it is the best thing God has going for Him in this world, and God’s people need to be reminded that the tithe is the LORD’s.”

This is why it is critical that we tithe! The Bible is very clear on this issue. We are to tithe 10% of our income to the church. When you put things in perspective, this is not a lot to ask because God owns 100% of what we have. Nothing we have is ours. It is God’s. God just lets us borrow it. And God says, “You can keep and enjoy 90% percent of what is mine, and I just ask for 10% of it back to help change others with my love.” The truth is most of us don’t think twice of tipping a waiter 15-20%, and God is asking for just 10%?

Now, I know it is tough for some of you. The economy is tight. Some of you have lost jobs. Give what you can. Deep in your heart you know what you are able to give and God knows it too. Set a goal that by such and such a time you will increase a percent and then by another set time you will reach 10%. But give something. Every bit counts!

Why Should We Give? God Wants Us to Put Him First In Our Life

I remember visiting an older man in the hospital several years ago. He was not expected to live very long. He was a man who lived a very colorful life, to say the least. He was a member of the church, but he was not very active. He would come during the holidays. As soon as I approached his bed, he began to sob. I took his hand. He looked at me and said, “Why didn’t someone tell me sooner?” I replied, “Tell you what sooner?

About your condition?” “

No!” he said.

“About my life.

Why didn’t anyone tell me sooner that I was wasting my life? Here I am at the very end of my life and I have thrown it all away. I have nothing to show for this gift of life God has given me except for escapades I am ashamed of. I have attended church all of my life. And all I heard from the preacher were a bunch of cute stories. Never once did any of the preachers tell me to stop wasting my life!”

From that moment on, I vowed as a preacher to preach boldly about making the best of the gift of life

God has given us. You are notified: Do not waste your life! Give it. Love it. Use it. Let it shine in the name of Almighty God.

Many problems go away once we start putting God first in our lives. And how do we put God first in our lives? By giving God what is important to us - our money, our resources, and our gifts. You want meaning, joy, fulfillment, and hope? Start serving - start giving - start tithing. Everything you want out of life is just outside your comfort zone.

Jesus said “If you want to keep your life, you will lose it. But if you lose your life, you will keep it.” What did Jesus mean by that? Is that some weird Zen statement? No, it means that life is found when we give it away. Real life is found when we give away our best. Why? Because that is the way God is and he created us in His image. So, when we start acting in the way we were designed to act, we find life. When we start giving our gifts away, real life begins. We connect with our destiny. We share with God the ecstasy of generosity. But when we hoard and keep and serve only ourselves we begin to die spiritually. I really hope we hear that.

In our text for today Paul gets to the heart of the matter by explaining a law that is just as sure as the law of gravity. It is called the law of increasing returns. Basically, this law states that the more we give, the more God gives us for the purpose of giving more! The more we give, the more God gives us the capacity to give. This is why generous people are never in need for God is always giving them more and they keep giving it away. It is beautiful circle of giving from God. And it is so much fun.

Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” You know what this verse means? Jesus is simply stating a fact. You want to know a person’s devotion to God? Don’t look at their prayer life. Don’t look at how often they attend church or read the Bible. Look at their bank statement. Look at their check book.

You see, Jesus is not after our money. Jesus doesn’t need our money. Jesus is after our hearts. Jesus knows that the direct route to many of our hearts is our pocketbooks. Jesus knows that until we can break free from the lie of consumption we will never be able to give God our hearts. Jesus knows that if we have a saving plan and a spending plan but no giving plan our life may be a total loss.

There can be no significant spiritual growth in your life unless you put your money and what you think about your money into God’s hands because it’s just too big and too pivotal an issue.

Why Should We Give? God Has Been Generous to Us!

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Many of us love this verse. It is the gospel in a nutshell. When we put our trust in Christ, we receive life in him. Notice the key word in this verse is “gave.” When we sinned, God gave. When we were lost, God loved. The heart of the gospel is generosity and it all begins when we understand that God loved and God gave. God gives us the highest model of generosity. Therefore, we are most like God when we give. We are most like God when we are generous. The Bible says be generous because God is generous. We give because He gave.

Most of you remember the story of Jesus going into the Temple and turning over the tables and the money changers and disrupting the corruption by the religious leaders. But what many miss is that the day before Jesus did this, the gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus wandered into the Temple just to look around.

Pasadena, what if Jesus wandered into our church? What if he went into our Sunday school classes and wandered into this worship service? What would he see? How would he respond? Right now, I want you to imagine Jesus sitting in the seat next to you. See the blood on his hands and feet and the wounds on his body. See the scars. And hear him say, “This is what I did for you. What will you do for me?”

There is an old story about the man who lived in a big, elaborate house in a fine neighborhood, but he was selfish and stingy. His friend across town lived in a little house, but he was generous, loving, and kind. They both died. They both went to heaven. They both received their reward.

The man with the little house was taken to the best neighborhood and shown the finest mansion in heaven. When the man who lived in the finest mansion on earth got to heaven, he was taken down to a back alley, around a muddy corner, and shown a shack. He said, “Wait a minute. On earth I had everything.

Why this?”

St. Peter said to him, “We could only build your house up here with the materials you sent us.”

What could heaven build you with the materials you have sent them? John Wesley said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all people you can, as long as you ever can.” And as we do, we just may hear God whisper in our ears, “Isn’t this fun?” Amen.