

## **TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE 4: SATIFYING YOUR SOUL'S THIRST FOR MORE... *"Pennies in the Fountain"***

We are 4 weeks into this adventure of trying to discover the treasures of a transformed life. Jesus does the transformation, but we begin to receive it through our Commitment to Him and His Church. We nurture this new-found relationship as we drink deeply through daily, (and sometimes more often) Prayer. We understand that part of our place on this planet is within the community of the Church, and we learned last week why the Church exists and what our Membership in that church really means. Today we are going to consider another step in the progression toward a transformed life, as we look at Stewardship. Ok, lets all sigh together...(exhale...another sermon on money.) Well, yes and no. This message certainly will mention money, but it is about something more, something broader, something deeper, and hopefully something more satisfying than just another sermon about money.

How would you like to make your giving a "Soul-Satisfying" experience? What would it mean to you to be given some tools that might help you build a satisfying stewardship life? How would you like your "Pennies in the Fountain", your "wish upon a star", approach to giving; to become something that brings deeper meaning and greater assurances into your life? How would you like your "Coins in the Casino", or your "when I win the Lottery" approach to giving; to become something more satisfying, even life defining? How would you like to see your stewardship transformed into something that might satisfy the deepest longings of your soul? Sound impossible; might be, but I'm willing to give it a try. So here goes.

### **1. GIVING THAT SATISFIES IS DONE OBEDIENTLY**

I know that most of us bristle when we think about doing anything out of a sense of duty or obedience, but we cannot begin any discussion about God-pleasing and Soul-Satisfying stewardship without considering obedience. You see, giving to God is not only expected of, and hoped for, from God's children; it is commanded. God's nature provides the example; God gave us life, God gave us Jesus, God gives us Hope...and God expects we follow this example.

I know that giving done obediently is only the starting place, that's why I placed it first, and I recognize that giving obediently might not be all that exciting...but knowing that we are fulfilling this important command of God does create a sense of spiritual well-being.

It was that sense of well-being that Moses wanted to insure in his wayward wanderers as they approached (finally, after 40 years) the Promised Land. That's why he issued this reminder in Deuteronomy 8:10

*Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the Lord your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and laws.*

You see, though the struggle had been long and hard, and with a difficult learning curve, those 40 years of wandering, those 40 years of depending on God for water from rocks, those 40 years of gathering the daily manna, those 40 years of purging the disobedient...had led the nation to a new place of growing wealth, prosperity, faithfulness and the prospect of an abundant arrival in the land flowing with milk and honey. Moses didn't want them to forget the Lord...in their plenty...and become disobedient to his commands.

I don't want us to either. There are more pleasant motivations for giving in the points yet to come, but we can't skip over this one.

We give because God gave. We give because God expects us too. We give (at least partially) because God commands us to. That is number one. Not pretty, not flashy, not exciting, maybe not even that much fun initially, but necessary none the less.

## **2. GIVING THAT SATISFIES IS DONE PURPOSEFULLY**

Ok, now this is getting more tolerable. Listen to these words of instructions from the Apostle Paul to his associate pastor Timothy:

*Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasures as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life. 1Tim. 6:17-19*

What a marvelous definition of purposeful giving. Don't trust your money, but trust God. Remember it all belongs to God, comes from God, meets all our NEEDS, and brings us enjoyment. So use your money to do good, generously, always ready to share. That is purposeful.

I am encouraged by how many of you are giving greater intention to your giving. I know it's easier to just give what you did last year, but soon that becomes what you gave last decade, or for the last 30 years. Even if you give a great amount; that's not very purposeful. I talked to a young man who asked how he ought to give his minimum tithe, when his income varies month to month. I suggested he prayerfully consider giving based on what he made last year, as long as he will continue to do so next year, and the year after that! God honored his intention, his purposefulness, and has blessed him.

I know others of you who are wrestling with giving on the gross or net portion of your earning. That's a good example of purposeful consideration. And my standard answer to those who ask...'do you want a gross or net blessing'?

I know some of you who every year calculate your increased giving based directly on your increased income. That's purposeful. I know others of you who are 'putting God to the test' and are stepping out in faith to tithe and more; that's giving with intention. I know some of you have committed to increasing your giving a percent or 2 a year till you reach the goal of tithing, and some who do this going beyond the tithe. That's purposeful. I know others of you who earn way more than you need, who are giving way more than the tithe, and you are an example for all of us, of purposeful giving. All I want to say is this: If you love Jesus, then give greater intention to making your giving purposeful... and do the very best you can...for Him. That will satisfy your soul.

### **3. GIVING THAT SATISFIES IS DONE JOYFULLY**

*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." 2 Cor. 9:7*

I hope you remember my discussion last fall that some translator of the Bible has used the word "hilariously"...God loves a hilarious giver. I like that. We're getting to the more exciting parts of God-pleasing and soul-satisfying giving now. I bristle at the reminder that we ought to give till it hurts, and prefer; giving till it feels good. From my perspective, from Susan and my perspective; we have fallen in love with giving. No, we're trying not to be stupid or irresponsible, and we certainly don't have all the money in the world, but after 30 years of tithing God has blessed us with enough humbling experiences of learning to live by faith, because we had no other options; that the ability now to give, more than the tithe...brings us great joy!

Joyful giving starts not in our checkbook, not even in our heart, but in our head! When we can mentally, intellectually and willfully remember that all we have belongs to God, all we have been given comes from God, and all we give brings glory to God, we can then embark on discovering the treasure of joyful giving. For giving to create joy in our lives, we must have the right attitude.

### **4. GIVING THAT SATISFIES IS DONE SACRIFICALLY**

I've not mentioned much from our chapter in the book this week, but the story I want to share now, comes directly from the Bible, via John Ed Mathison in his book; The Treasures of the Transformed life. In 1 Kings 17:13 we read:

*But Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son.*

This amazing story illustrates most of the principles I've been discussing today, but gives us greatest insight to consider giving sacrificially, as a means to transform our giving into a soul-satisfying experience.

The story is of Elijah, the great prophet of God. His travels lead him to Zarephath, where after a number of days without food or water, he encounters a widow in the weeds gathering sticks. Elijah asks of the woman to get him a drink of water, which she immediately rises to do, and then adds this to his request; *"bring me a bite of bread, too."* The woman stops in her tracks, faces this Spiritual giant of a man and says:

*"I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die."*

It is then that Elijah's response we read earlier takes on its spiritual and sacrificial significance. Do you really think Elijah would ask this woman to give her last bread to him first, instead of feeding her only son before they together go off to die? Remember that there is a lesson here, under the surface. The lesson is for us, my friends.

God expects that we give to Him first...not the left over's after our needs, wants, wishes and whims have been fulfilled. Even when its cost is significant, even when sacrifice is involved, even when we might die!!! You can interpret this passage and temper its significance, but you can't argue or change its meaning. Sometimes giving to God requires sacrifice.

Now, the rest of the story. The woman obeys Elijah, does as she was commanded, obeys without hesitation, trusts God's servant. And lo and behold, just as the Lord had promised, from that point on, *"there was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers."* Sweet. But it gets better. Seems Elijah and this woman and her son become friends. He stays with them whenever he is in town. They give him his own room in their home. And some time later her son dies, and she calls for Elijah, and he comes running, grabs the boy, takes him to the Prophets room, lays down on top of his body, and three times begs God to revive this dead child; and He does. Think her sacrificial giving produced any joy in her life? Her joy will be explored in this final step.

##### **5. GIVING THAT SATISFIES IS DONE EXPECTANTLY**

*If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving – large or small - it will be used to measure what is given back to you.*  
Lk 6:38

I don't know what the woman expected when she obediently and sacrificially and purposefully went to her empty kitchen to prepare the prophets bread; but I cannot doubt that what she received...her dead son back to life...was in direct proportion to what she gave...her willingness to die so God's prophet could live.

I know that what we receive never ought to be the first, or major or primary motivation for giving, that's why I've left it to last. But in spite of all the "Big Hair Channel" abuses and distortions of sowing seeds and reaping 100 fold harvests; we cannot discount this truth: giving with an expectation is not wrong. God has promised to take care of us, meet our needs, give us salvation and stuff for our enjoyment! I don't necessarily agree or even like the principle that; "You can't out give God", but its true, and so many of you are discovering that! I'm not saying God will match our financial gifts with 10, 50, or 100 fold fiscal windfalls, but show me someone whose life is worsened because they gave obediently, purposefully, joyfully, and sacrificially. I dare you to show me.

Our God is a God of abundance...look around. Do we really need 4000 different kinds of plants to remind us that God values beauty? Do we really need hundreds of different varieties of song birds to know that God loves music? Do we really need millions of miles of ocean water to know how much God loves watching the sun set... and rise again? Do we really need all the blessings, when we've already received salvation? Do we really need heaven, when our lives on this beautiful planet end? God is an abundant God, and God expects us to expect good things when we give the way God wants us to give. Soul satisfying giving is expectant.

In conclusion, I must share the one thought that most profoundly struck me from the readings this week. I've waited till the end, not because it didn't fit in my outline, but because it fit at every point in the outline, could have replaced the outline, should be remembered beyond this sermon, this service, this study...this life.

Quote: "When we give, we receive the miracle of being able to decrease while God increases in our life. We die to our own selfishness a little bit each time we write a tithe check to God...and the more we die to ourselves, the more we become like Christ."

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How to make giving a soul-satisfying experience:

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*"I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die." 1 Kings 17:12*

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