

FINANCIAL HEALTH FOR ME AND MY CHURCH 4

“DISCIPLINED GIVING VERSES SACRIFICIAL GIVING”

“Since you excel in so many ways – you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us – now I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8: 7

1. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE _____

“When you give a gift to someone in need, don’t shout about it as the hypocrites do...”
Mt. 6: 3-4

2. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE _____

“On every Lord’s day each of you should put aside some amount of money...for the offering.” 1 Cor. 16:2

3. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE _____

“On every Lord’s day each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for the offering.” 1 Cor. 16:2

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“If you are really eager to give, it isn’t important how much you are able to give. God wants you to give what you have, not what you don’t have. Of course, I don’t mean you should give so much that you suffer from having too little. I only mean that there should be some equality.” 2 Cor 8:12-13

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“Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord, and to us for whatever directions God might give them.”
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“...and they gave it of their own free will...” 2 Cor. 8: 3
“Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable...” 2 Corinthians 8:11-12

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“...don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully.” 2 Cor. 9:7

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“Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously...You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts. For your generosity to them will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ” 2 Cor. 9: 11, 13

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“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” Deuteronomy 8:17-18

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“For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.” Mk 12: 41-44

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It has been fun discussing some important practical matters concerning money over the past 3 weeks. It has been interesting dispelling some money myths also. We have considered that God doesn't need our money near as much as we need to give it. We have analyzed why giving to change lives is more meaningful than giving to budgets. And we have discovered that the amounts of money we give are not near as important as the amounts we have left over. Today affords us another opportunity to consider a practical spiritual truth pertaining to giving.

Many people taut Sacrificial Giving as the ultimate standard that every Christian ought to aspire to achieve. As we considered last week, and will mention again today, Sacrificial Giving is occasionally necessary, but it is hardly sustainable. Let me share a second hand story. A friend of mine relayed to me his experience while attending another church, in another city. The church undertook a significant building project, and solicited pledges from all the members. My friend and his family took seriously the pleading of the Pastor, elders, and deacons as they encouraged each member to give sacrificially. My friend and family agreed, and made a number of huge personal sacrifices to commit themselves to this three-year campaign. About half way through the campaign, the church leaders decided to call in the pledges early, and again exhorted the troops to dig deeper and give sacrificially, and pay off their pledges sacrificially. Many of the elder and leaders testified of their ability to respond and give even more than they had pledged. My buddy asked me, “if they were able to do so much more the second time around, had they really done all they could the first time?” Good question, that brings us to our message today.

I believe God does expect us to occasionally make sacrificial gifts, but for the most part, if they are truly sacrificial, then they are virtually impossible to sustain over a long period of time. I believe God's instructions in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 reveal a much healthier, and more sustainable model that I prefer to call Disciplined Giving. I gave my best effort to keeping this sermon to 5 points or less, and failed miserably. These two chapters contain at least 10 examples of Disciplined Giving that I am blessed to share with you. Let's begin. (Really, I'm making up for not having an outline last week)

1. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE HUMBLY

"When you give a gift to someone in need, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do..."
Mt. 6: 3-4

Disciplined giving begins with an attitude of humility. Jesus was always reminding the Pharisees that true religious practice contains nothing of the 'showoffness' they were famous for. So too the lesson applies for us. We live in a culture that has become very self-centered. Most of us are looking for a good return on all our investments. Even donating time must produce some sense of meaning for our lives. Certainly we can't be expected to give, and not get something in return, and if that return is not monetary, then the least we can expect is some public adulation in recognition for our gift. Jesus warns us as he speaks to the Pharisees about such attitudes.

Disciplined giving begins with an attitude of humility founded on a recognition that all that we are, and all that we have, are gifts from God. We should be humbled and honored when we have the privilege to give, to God! Humble giving also means that we don't attempt to use our money to manipulate someone or the church to do something we prefer. Humble giving means we don't give or withhold our money as a power play to accomplish some personal agenda.

2. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE HABITUALLY

"On every Lord's day each of you should put aside some amount of money...for the offering."
I Cor. 16:2

I believe that what Paul is advocating here is a practical necessity for all of us. I know that some people get paid every other week, and some get paid monthly, and some of you may be earning assets you plan to give, but the earnings come only quarterly or even annually. So was Paul misunderstanding our economic situation while writing 2000 years ago? Maybe so. I believe Paul instructed his hearers, and us that we ought to give each week as a reminder of our dependence upon God. I know I need to be reminded everyday that all I have is a gift from God, and at least weekly, I must place myself on His altar, as I place my tithe in the offering plate symbolically.

I promised the Ad Team last week that I would announce my prescription to addressing and solving all our financial woes this morning, so here goes. I have a personal belief that we would have no money problems whatsoever if every person gave every week what they give when they come. Not too profound...or is it. You see many people bring to church the concert or ball game mentality that you pay when you go. Many people look at their responsibility to God and the church only when they are in the house, but our needs go on each and every week. I wish each of us would listen to this scripture, and commit to giving each week, as God has blessed us.

3. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE PROPORTIONALLY

"On every Lord's day each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for the offering." 1 Cor. 16:2

Let me explain the meaning of the tithe. God instituted a system of giving with His children early in their relationship that has not changed to this day. Yes, Jesus redefined that institution with his insistence that we come to terms with the fact that true disciples don't own anything, that everything belongs to God, but the tithe is still taught as the minimum standard for a Christian to give.

To tithe simply means that you give the first 10% of your income to the Lord. It's a very personal question whether that should be before or after taxes, I always ask 'do you want a gross or a net blessing, whenever someone asks me'.

And one ought to at least explore the tax implications of making your contributions before paying your taxes. I know God is not a rigid bank accountant keeping meticulous track of our every penny, but tithing ought to be our goal, and I'll share more about that next week on Celebrate Unity Sunday.

Disciplined giving needs to be proportional; that is biblical.

4. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE REALISTICALLY

"If you are really eager to give, it isn't important how much you are able to give. God wants you to give what you have, not what you don't have. Of course, I don't mean you should give so much that you suffer from having too little. I only mean that there should be some equality."

2 Cor 8:12-13

"All must give as they are able, according to the blessings given to them by the Lord your God."

Deut. 16:17

Immediately most of us agree that is right, and we think: "well of course that makes sense, I certainly don't want to give more than I can afford, or more than my fair share." I want to ask you to consider the other side of the coin: "well of course that makes sense, I certainly don't want to give less than I can afford, or less than my fair share."

Realistic giving simply means giving in proportion to your income, resources and blessings, all you can afford. Later in this passage Paul uses a farming metaphor I find intriguing. He says the farmer who sows sparingly, will reap sparingly. There is a spiritual discipline of giving, sometimes beyond our ability to see where the money will come from, as a test of God's faithfulness, and our obedience. Kind of like what Mark heard from Dr. Swindoll while driving to Minot on Thurs. "There are many people sitting around waiting for their ship to come in, who have never sent one out!" Sometimes we need to 'cast our bread' on the water, to see how God will return great blessing to our lives.

5. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE INTENTIONALLY

"Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes, for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord, and to us for whatever directions God might give them."

2 Cor 8: 5

"you should each make up your own mind as to how much you should give." 2 Cor 9:7

These two passages make it crystal clear that our giving must be done with great intention, great conviction, great planning, and great commitment. Notice what the Macedonian Christians did before they took up the offering: *“The dedicated themselves to the Lord...”* Our giving ought always to be viewed as a response to our commitment and dedication to Jesus Christ. He spoke often about measuring or weighing the cost of being his disciple. We often approach giving casually, or flippantly or even maliciously. We'll just throw in whatever we might have in our purse or wallet. Our giving is a reflection of our relationship with Christ. If we care no more about giving than that, what does that say about how we feel about Jesus?

6. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE WILLINGLY

“...and they gave it of their own free will...” 2 Cor. 8: 3

“Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable...”

2 Corinthians 8:11-12

“They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem.”

2 Cor. 8: 4

I used to pay my taxes grudgingly, until some saintly person sent from God, reminded me what paying taxes means. It means I have a job, I earn an income, I am able to provide for my family and my responsibilities. Paying taxes means I am privileged to live in one of the greatest free countries in the world, with all its blessings and bonuses.

Some people look at giving the same way, begrudgingly. Maybe I'll play the saintly reminder today. Think of what giving really means. It means you have an income, maybe not as much as you'd like, or even as much as you need. Disciplined Giving reminds us that we give because God gave, its implanted in our nature by the Holy Spirit, that we humans are givers. It means that we have been blessed. It means we are citizens of another kingdom yet to be realized. It means we have been given the greatest gift of all, Salvation through Jesus Christ, and giving is small token of our thanksgiving.

7. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE CHEERFULLY

“...don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully.”
2 Cor. 9:7

Some folks are fond of the saying: “As Christians we need to give till it hurts.” Which frankly, reveals the fallacy that grounds this whole message. No body likes pain! I saw a t-shirt on a guy at the Y the other day I could certainly identify with. You have seen the ones with the barbells, and sculpted physiques on them saying: “No Pain, No Gain?” The t-shirt I saw on the rather large belly of a not so large fellow was: “No Pain, NO PAIN!” It was probably a beer shirt.

I propose to you that instead of giving till it hurts; lets learn to give till it feels good! God loves cheerful giving. There is hardly any greater joy than giving. I have often prayed to win the lottery, so I could experience the joy of giving all that money away, but since I don’t play the lottery, and would be grossly embarrassed to win it, I guess that to be an impossible pray for God to answer. I do love giving, and it wasn’t always so. I think we grow into it.

8. DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE GENEROUSLY

“Yes, you will be enriched so that you can give even more generously...You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts. For your generosity to them will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ”
2 Cor. 9: 11, 13

I’m not lying to you, and this is no sermon double talk, there is a difference between generous giving and sacrificial giving. Last week I mentioned the quote from Jesus, that *“to whom much has been given, much will be required.”* I know that we have fallen on difficult times in our country and in our church financially, but we are all still filthy rich in comparison to the vast majority of persons living in this world. I don’t mean to minimize the struggle nor the significance of some folks financial condition as a result of 9-11, or the collapse of the corrupt corporations, but generosity is still within our means, if its within our hearts.

God has promised to care for his children, sometimes we are the recipients of that care, and sometimes we are the agents of that care! Think about that.

9. **DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE GRATEFULLY**

"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." Deuteronomy 8:17-18

The discipline of grateful giving means that no check is written, no bill is shared, no coin is tossed in the little red bucket without a prayer attached that includes our heartfelt gratitude for ALL God has done for us, and ALL God will do with our gifts. We have been given so much. Yes, we earn plenty, but even the ability to earn is a gift from God. And the blessing of having a job is a gift from God. Forever we must be grateful for what God has given, and whenever we give, we should say thanks; thanks for the means to give, for the joy of giving, for all You have given me. It's the least and most important thing we can do.

10. **DISCIPLINED GIVING MEANS TO GIVE SACRIFICIALLY**

"For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has." Mk 12: 41-44

"they give not only what they could afford, but far more." 2 Cor. 8: 3

Lest you think I've completely lost my mind, and am going back on the title of this message let me remind you again. Sacrificial giving is sometimes necessary for us as Christians. We are sometimes in our lives called upon to make significant sacrifices; and hopefully when the bell rings, we'll answer the call. But sacrificial giving of the ultimate variety has already been made, and one savior is all we need!

Martin Luther is famous for saying: "A religion that **gives** nothing, **costs** nothing, and **suffers** nothing, is **worth** nothing."

I am grateful that the relationship that we can have with Jesus Christ is built and based on the supreme sacrifice, His own life. But I am also grateful that because He died, we don't have to! And because He gave His life, he has shown us the way to please God. Yes, sometimes it might involve sacrifice, but for the most part, and for the long haul, Disciplined Giving is preferred, and for that I am also grateful. You?

