Shaped By Generosity

Along the Way
November 2012
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“The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity”, by Walter Brueggemann
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The Generosity Experiment, Sasha Dichter
http://www.ted.com/talks/sasha_dichter.html
In God We Trust - Introduction

We Worship a Giving God

We worship a giving God. From the creation of the world to the provision of manna in the desert, from the miraculous catch of fish to changing the water into wine to the offering of God’s own Son on the cross - our God gives and gives abundantly.

As those who are trying to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, what we say about God has implications for how we live our lives. Giving flows out of the character of God; therefore who we are and how we live must flow out of that same character as well. We must be people shaped by God’s generosity; not simply recipients of it, but conduits of it as well.

God’s Generosity Should Shape Our Lives

This series, In God We Trust, focuses on our need to live into and out of God’s generosity. We will look at giving through the lens of the Four Callings – Worship, Discipleship, Community, and Mission.

- We give as an act of **worship** in response to the giving nature of God.

- We give as an act of **discipleship** so that we might grow in Christ-likeness, patterning our thoughts and behaviors after the One who gave his life away daily to those in need, and ultimately, on the cross.

- We give as an act of **community** as the body of Christ, recognizing our interdependence and common purpose and our responsibility toward one another.

- We give as an act of **mission** so that we might participate in the living out of Jesus’ prayer, “Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.”

We will address obstacles in our lives that keep us from fully trusting God, particularly with our finances, and will practice habits that will help to release God’s generosity in the world through us.

Seeing Abundance

One of the biggest obstacles to our practice of Generosity is **seeing the abundance of God’s blessings** in our lives. In our culture we admire the ‘self-made man or woman.’ Too often we take for granted all of the ways that God blesses us – with natural talents, advantages of where and to whom we are born, more than adequate food and shelter; some so ‘ordinary’ that we overlook their abundance. Some seem too small to mention. The more we overlook these ordinary blessings, the more ‘self-made,’ and ‘self-concerned,’ we become. We start to forget how much we depend on God and how active he is in our daily well-being. We begin to believe the myth of scarcity, that if we don’t clutch and protect what we have, we will be without, forgetting that all we have is God’s first.

Biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, states it more forcefully:
"We who are now the richest nation are today’s main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity – a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity."

(Walter Brueggemann, “The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity”)

DAILY EXERCISE – Blessings of a Giving God:

As a part of In God We Trust, we will address this obstacle to living generously with a daily exercise. Each day, as a part of the daily devotion, you will be asked to:

- Name an ‘ordinary blessing.’
- Write it down in the space provided.
- Find a penny and allow that penny to represent your ordinary blessing.

Pennies, after all, are overlooked as well, aren’t they? We take them for granted, question their worth. When we see them on the street, we don’t even bend down to pick them up.

- Place the penny representing your ordinary blessing in a clear jar in your house or your office, somewhere you can see it each day.

As these sacred pennies accumulate in your jar during this study, they will serve as a physical reminder of the many Blessings of a Giving God in your life.

Practicing Generosity

CORPORATE CHALLENGE - The Generosity Experiment

We become what we do regularly. In addition to seeing God’s abundance all around us, if we are to become generous people, we need to practice generosity.

What is the Generosity Experiment? Saying ‘Yes’ to requests for money for 30 days. Panhandlers, charities... I still have a fond place in my heart for the neighbor who always said ‘Yes’ when we sold Christmas cards each year. For me, it was less about the ‘sale’ and more about the open and welcoming feeling I had when I arrived at her door. It is the same feeling, to me, of God’s ‘Yes’ to us.

Now most of us like to feel like we are generous people; that we will meet a legitimate need if we can. But let’s face it, giving that produces the character of generosity is challenging. It requires intentional awareness of the needs of others, a sacrifice of time and resources beyond what comes naturally, and a good bit of risk. Some people may take advantage of us. It may cost us something.
The reality is, Jesus was more concerned with what money does to us than what others do with our money. We hold it tight, yet others are in need. We choose a sense of security over a glimpse of the kingdom, the possibility that our meager sack lunch might be used to feed the 5000.

Saying ‘Yes’ is an exercise in unclenching our hand. It is creating a muscle memory in our heart that is more open than self-protective. Saying ‘Yes’ practices putting God and God’s agenda first in the daily choices of life. It is allowing God to transform us.

**Are you up for the Experiment?**

Remember, this is about *In God We Trust*; allowing God to shape his generosity in you by trusting him with your money. It is about seeing people as God sees them and viewing what resources you’ve been entrusted with as resources that God wants to use.

God is not asking you to give more than you have, but rather to look at your life and realize that you have more than you think.

**Preparing to say ‘Yes’**

Generosity comes through planning in advance to say, ‘Yes.’ Our question should be “Why can’t we say ‘Yes’?” not “Why should we say ‘No’?”

Here are some ways to be prepared to say ‘Yes’:

- **Pray.** Ask God for a vision of how he wants to grow his generosity in you. What are the biggest barriers for you and how does he want to address them?

- **Set aside money at the beginning of the 30 days that is for others.** Pray about how much that might be. Keep it with you so that you can meet an unexpected request.

- **Tithe your grocery bill.** If you buy $100 in groceries, purchase a $10 grocery store card and keep it with you to give to someone else when the opportunity arises. If your budget for groceries is $100, put a couple things back on the shelf this week as an act of sacrifice, making room for that $10 gift card for others who are hungry.

- **If you are uncomfortable giving cash to a stranger, buy gift certificates for a fast food restaurant so that someone who is hungry can get a meal.**

Play fair. Don’t go hitting your Sunday School class friends up for money because they have committed to the Generosity Experiment and they have to say ‘Yes.’

If, at the end of the 30 days, you still have some of the money that you had set aside, or grocery store gift cards or restaurant gift certificates left over, find someone who needs them. Take them to a shelter or to Good Shepherd House or Christian Women’s Job Corps. Give them to folks who come to eat dinner at the Tuesday Night homeless ministry.

*In God We Trust*

Let’s Get Started!
Week One: Giving as an Act of Worship

October 29- November 4, 2012

In God We Trust. We give because of who God is. We know that everything we have and everything we are is, first and foremost, God’s gift to us. We are simply stewards of God’s resources. We do not choose whether we want to be stewards or not. We are stewards. The question is whether we will be good stewards, or not; whether we will remember the One from whom all blessings flow or whether we make ourselves gods in our own worlds, clutching our money and our treasures as our rightful possessions, or holding them with open hands to be used as God directs for God’s pleasure and purposes.

The reality is, what we truly worship is reflected in our spending and giving behaviors.

The Scripture text for our devotions this week remind us of who God is and some of the challenges we are likely to face Along the Way as, In God We Trust. These texts are:

- Psalm 104 – A hymn of God’s creation and providence
- Matthew 6:25-34 – An admonition not to worry
- Genesis 1:28-30 - A reminder that God has made us stewards over his creation
- Exodus 17:1-7 – A story of the power of the God we trust
- John 12:1-8 – A picture of unreserved adoration and worship
- Deuteronomy 8:1-20 – A warning not to forget God just because things are going well

The Generosity Experiment:

When you say ‘yes’ this week as you put the Generosity Experiment into practice this week, let your ‘yes’ be an act of worship. Say ‘yes,’ not because you feel charitable or the other person seems ‘worthy;’ say ‘yes’ because of who God is and because he said ‘Yes’ to you in Jesus Christ.
Devotions on Giving as an Act of Worship

Monday, October 29th - God of All Creation

Psalm 104:1-35

“24 How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.
25 There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things both large and small.
26 There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.
27 All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.
28 When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.
29 When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.
30 When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.” - Psalm 104:24-30

Psalm 104 is essentially an account of the Lord’s creation, His sustaining of that creation, the ultimate trust and reliance that creation has on His provision, and finally the praising of that Creator. Much earlier in Psalms (chapter 8), we learn of the dominion God has given us over His creation. But like any other great gift, follows great responsibility.

Many times, when we think of "worship", we think of singing. Of music, of happy, care free, easy communication of our love for our God. But worship is much deeper than this. Worship should also be sacrificial. A giving up of something. Much like those of the Old Testament, were expected to sacrifice something to the Lord. But in this case, He isn’t necessarily asking for our fattest calf, or our first fruits. Quite possibly, he wants our time. He could want our money. He could even want our talents. As followers of Christ, we find our ultimate satisfaction - our redemption and our hopes - in Him alone. As His followers, we are to model our lives after His example, rather than that of the world. As our Creator, He took care of and cultivated His creation and all it held. As our Lord, He sacrificed for us in the greatest example for our understanding - by giving His life.

Is it possible that as a Christian, we are also called to cultivate and give in our lives and communities, as well? I think so. The hard part about these acts, though, is just that - they’re not easy. By nature, we gather and consume and hoard each provision we can get our hands on. It’s a scary, uncertain world out there, and this helps us to feel safe and secure. Whether it’s money, or our time, or our gifts. But to follow Him, we are called to lay down those natural tendencies, and instead follow His lead on how to live, see Him for our ultimate satisfaction. These are true acts of worship.

May we continue to praise Him with our lips, and learn to praise him with our resources as well, as we strive to take care of our fellow brothers and sisters as well as this beautiful world He has given us. Even when it hurts.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a blessing of God’s creation.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to deepen your awe of his creation today.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Tuesday, October 30th - Do Not Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

"25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?... 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” - Matthew 6:25, 32-33

Coming up with a devotional on Matthew 6:25-34 was a tough task for me. I did not know how I would start this devotional. As days were going by, I began to worry. I knew I was running out of time to write a devotional on these scriptures. On a Thursday morning I asked God to help me. I was waiting for God to speak to me directly, but instead, he sent a woman named Emilia to help me. This is what we came up with.

The Lord Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life...” (Matthew 6:25a). He showed us how we can get to the state of peace and tranquility. He pointed the way to live life free of worries. When we first “seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” all these thing will be added unto us – food, clothes, financial provision, etc. What is the Kingdom of God? To us, Jesus meant ‘seek me, seek the Father.’ The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor. The Hebrew meaning of the word righteousness is charity and justice. When we hear and obey the voice of the Lord to do his commandments, our lives will be free of worries.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a blessing of a need met.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God how to seek his kingdom first today.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Wednesday, October 31st - Good Stewards

Genesis 1:28-30

“28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.”

Worship is something that we give back to God. In the beginning, God blessed and charged us to ‘be fruitful and multiply.’ He made the flora and fauna of the earth, all living things, and, ‘It was so.’ ‘All that He had made…it was very good.’ God has entrusted us with good things in this world and has faith in us to ‘rule over’ what He has given.

God gave us His Son who speaks directly to us and through parables, the stories to which we might relate. In the parable of the Talents, the master entrusted three servants with some talents, his money. Two invested wisely and doubled what the master had given; one hid away his single talent. Whether we have money, ‘talents’ as gifts/skills, or a bright or rainy new morning filled with promise, God has charged us to be good stewards of all His gifts. Appreciate them. Worship and honor God by tending what He has given. "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

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**Blessings of a Giving God** (see p.4): ______________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is enough food to eat. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing. As you pray, thank God for it. Pray for the hungry and how you can respond. Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Thursday, November 1st - Water From a Rock

Exodus 17:1-7

“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?” But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

4 Then Moses cried out to the Lord, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The Lord answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

When I was a child I was fascinated with rocks. I still am. I love the feel of a rock in my pocket. I am awed by the forces that determine a rock’s color, hardness, and texture. A rock reminds me of the power of the Holy Spirit in my daily life. Each time I sing the hymn, "Rock of Ages," I am reminded that God is with me each day and is my refuge and strength.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps God made a way for you. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to expand your ideas of what is possible. Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Friday, November 2nd - Anointing Jesus

John 12:1-8

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

7 “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

I have always been drawn to this story of Mary anointing Jesus’ feet. To me it is a moment of such absolute freedom. She loves Jesus with abandon, with no concern for what anyone around her thinks. She gives to Jesus what is most likely one of her most prized possession in a beautiful and humble act of worship.

Sometimes I feel so measured in my response to God. I keep myself in check in worship, physically and emotionally. I give methodically. But often I wonder, what would that grand gesture look like for me? What would move me to Jesus’ feet like Mary?

I worship in holy expectancy of that moment.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): _________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps a kind word said to you.
   Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
   As you pray, thank God for it. Offer extravagant praise to God.
   Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Saturday, November 3rd - Do Not Forget Your God

Deuteronomy 8:1-20

“10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” - Deuteronomy 8:10-14

There have been times in my life when I have struggled with giving of time, skills or money because I viewed it as a duty. I felt like I was sacrificing a resource that I had in limited supply. Not until I came to the realization that I was holding onto the blessings that God had entrusted to me did I understand that giving was one of the purest forms of worship. By freely serving and sharing what God has blessed me with, I am showing gratefulness for His ultimate sacrifice; the gift of his Son.

I have come to understand that God’s blessings are just that; belongings that were not mine to begin with and must be shared as freely as God shared with me. As I have been living closer to God and aware of how he would have me live, I have begun to accept that God has provided all that I have in my life. What better way to show my love and appreciation than to give my time, efforts, skills and talents to perform the same work that Jesus Christ did in this world by helping and loving my fellow man?

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a comfortable place to live. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Acknowledge that all you have is a gift of God.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.

14
November 4th Sunday School Lesson
Giving As an Act of Worship – Deuteronomy 8:1-20

Deuteronomy 8:1-20

“Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. 2 Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

6 Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; 8 a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; 9 a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. 17 You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” 18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

19 If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. 20 Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.”

What motivates us to give? Sometimes it is an outpouring of love for the other person. Sometimes it is appreciation for what the other person has done for us. Sometimes it is because we see a need and want to help meet that need. Sometimes we must confess it is a sense of duty or even the feeling that there will be trouble if we don't give. Depending on our motivation, there may be great joy in giving or none at all.
What about our motivation for our giving to the Lord? Certainly it should be an act of love and appreciation, as well as a desire to meet some need, and not merely a duty or because it is expected. In short, it should be an act of worship, whenever and wherever it takes place.

In Deuteronomy 8, Moses reminds the Israelites of how much God has done for them, bringing them out of slavery in Egypt, caring for them in the wilderness in spite of their lack of faith, and bringing them into the Promised Land of Canaan. He warns them against the dangers of forgetting God once they have established themselves in the land, lest they begin to think that their wealth is solely a result of their own work:

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. . . . You may say to yourself, ‘My power and strength have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

In Deuteronomy 26, the Israelites are given a template for giving as an act of worship. They are to bring some of the first fruits of their crops before the harvest, and to come before the priest and recite from memory what God has done for them as a people:

“My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people, and lived there, and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.”

This was to be characterized by feasting and rejoicing in God’s blessings, and in faith that the harvest to come would meet their needs for the coming year.

John 12 also provides us with another model for giving. After Jesus has raised Lazarus, his sister Mary washed Jesus’ feet with an expensive bottle of perfume. Some see it as a colossal waste of money. Jesus, however, sees it as a beautiful act of love and a prophetic preparation of his body for burial (his arrest and crucifixion were imminent).

Luke tells a similar story early in his Gospel. Jesus has been invited by a Pharisee to be a guest at a dinner in his home. A woman who is known to have been a sinner sneaks in uninvited and begins washing Jesus’ feet being with perfume and her tears, wiping his feet with her hair. The Pharisee is disgusted, but Jesus reminds him that whereas he hadn’t even shown the customary common courtesy of having Jesus’ feet washed when he entered the house, this woman’s lavish act was an outpouring of thankfulness for having been forgiven so much.

This last story illustrates the fact that our giving often reveals our perception of what God has done for us. If we give little compared to what we have, perhaps we have forgotten how great our
poverty was without Christ. We were without hope, lost and unable to save ourselves. We need to remind ourselves that we have nothing that was not given to us. Not our goodness, not our acceptance by God, not our abilities, not our wealth. We need to review our history on a regular basis. What was our life like before we were saved? Where would we be now if God had not intervened in our lives, time and time again? In spite of all our efforts, none of us is completely self-made. We were given a set of DNA. We were born with certain abilities and limitations. We were given certain breaks. Certain doors were opened for us. We did not do it all ourselves. We have been given so much. Surely we can joyfully give back to the Lord who is the source of our blessings.

Why not, as soon as we receive our paycheck, set aside what we can give to the Lord, in anticipation of joyful giving? Write those checks early. Save back some cash and put it in a special place in our billfold, to be prepared to give to someone the Lord brings our way. Seek for guidance on additional ways to give to the Lord, and find ways we can cut back on waste and unnecessary discretionary spending on ourselves, so we will have more to give. Find a mission to support, buy more food or toiletries for Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard, soccer balls for kids in Guatemala, taking a friend out to lunch who needs desperately to talk to someone, whatever the Lord leads us to do. Our giving can be a part of our daily life, a life overflowing with worship and thanksgiving and a desire to share our blessings with others because God has indeed blessed us so much.

Reflections & Notes

Look back over the devotions, lesson and Blessings of a Giving God that you wrote down this week. Think about the sermon and your practice of the Generosity Experiment.

What have you learned about God’s generosity?
How have you been challenged in your own?
How do you need to trust in God more?
Week Two: Giving as an Act of Discipleship

November 5-11, 2012

In God We Trust. Giving is an act of the heart, a heart shaped by Christ. Paul writes, “If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:3) We give because Jesus gave. In love, he gave his life away daily to those in need, and ultimately, on the cross for each of us that we might know God. As we follow Jesus in such sacrificial giving, we grow in Christlikeness. God transforms our heart to look like his.

The Scripture texts for our devotions this week paint a picture for us of what giving lived out in the life of a disciple looks like Along the Way as, In God We Trust. These texts are:

- Matthew 6:19-21 – A call to examine what we truly treasure.
- Romans 12:9-12 – A picture of self-giving love in action.
- Philippians 2:1-11 – A reminder of the humble, servant nature of Christ.
- Genesis 41:37-57 – A story of obedience in the midst of trouble.
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 – A promise of the gifts God gives us.

The Generosity Experiment:
When you say ‘yes’ this week as you put the Generosity Experiment into practice this week, let your ‘yes’ be an act of discipleship. Say ‘yes,’ not because you feel charitable or the other person seems ‘worthy,’ say ‘yes’ because you want to become more like Jesus.

Discipleship at FBC
Devotions on Giving as an Act of Discipleship

Monday, November 10th - Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:19-21

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

What does Stewardship mean to me? Stewardship is how I manage the many gifts that our gracious God has given to me to take care of while on this earth. Stewardship is reflecting upon our giftedness and treasures; our family, friends, time, talents, skills and possessions and finances.

Perhaps you are like me and many other people. We sometimes think, “I will just take care of the very most important things for my family and then give the rest of my time and talents to the church and community.” Is this what God meant for us to do? I personally struggle with this at times, thinking I need to take control of something instead of having the faith and trust that God is in control of my situations and not me.

A disciple realizes that everything we have is a gift from God and we have not created any of our blessings. Our talent, skills and financial resources are ALL treasures given to us for the building of God’s Kingdom – all for His honor and glory. I am praying daily to be that kind of disciple; to trust God and exercise my faith that God will do as He has promised.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ________________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Maybe something that brings you joy.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to show you where your treasure is.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Tuesday, November 6th - Love in Action

Romans 12:9-13

“9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

Discipleship is all about communicating the love of Christ to the world. What better way to do this than by example. By showing, not just telling, the love of Christ we can have a much more poignant impact of the world. The Bible teaches that we are known by our fruit. If we put hands and feet to the words of Christ, our community will be able to more clearly see the One who has called us to His work.

How are we to do this? We have all been blessed with particular skills and resources. Whether it be talents, technical knowledge, financial resources, or the precious commodity of time; we all have some way we can contribute to the furthering of Christ’s Kingdom here on earth. It is by becoming fully engaged followers of Christ that we can most effectively disciple a world the desperately needs to see His love.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): __________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a close friend.
Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to show you how to live a life of love today.
Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Wednesday, November 7th - United With Christ

Philippians 2:1-11

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.  Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” - Philippians 2:1-4

As we read our passage for today, it tells us to consider others better than self. Throughout the Gospels, we learn how Jesus gave of His time to be with others so He could help them, minister to them, and provide for their needs. He even humbled himself to the task of washing dirty feet and choosing to die on a cross for all of us. He stated that He came not to be served, BUT TO SERVE. What a great example of stewardship!

If I am to be united with Christ, then His example should be mine. I should look each day for opportunities to give to others, to help them, and to be His disciple, His steward, even in this world where taking care of number one seems to be so much more important than the example He gave us. I believe giving of my time, my skills, and my resources will help make me a better disciple for Him!

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): __________________________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps a humbling moment or gesture. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to help you to be a servant today.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Thursday, November 8th – Obedience in the Midst of Trouble

Genesis 41:37-57

“46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt. 47 During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. 48 Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. 49 Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

50 Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. 51 Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” 52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” - Genesis 41:46-52

Joseph’s second son was born while he was in Egypt and he named him Ephraim, “because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” What an incredible promise! That we can be fruitful in the land of our suffering.

Our sufferings and trials and difficult circumstances are not things that we endure until our real life begins. They are the journey and God is in the midst of it. Joseph gave of himself fully even though he had been sold into slavery by his brothers. God wanted to use him right there, in the midst of his struggle.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): __________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Maybe a hardship that became a gift.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to help you find him in places where you struggle.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Friday, November 9th - One God, Many Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

“7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” - 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

In the news today we hear a lot of talk about who gives their fair share, who should give more or less and it is all about money. Often I wonder why no one is required to give of their time or their talents in the place of money. Wouldn’t this world be a better place if more emphasis was placed on giving your time, your abilities and your talents to help those in need rather than use it to make enough money to pay your taxes every year?

For many years, I thought, if I can just make enough money to pay my bills and tithe, I’ll be good with the Lord. It wasn’t until the recent economic downturn and some other experiences in my life that I realized how valuable my time and my talents were. I realized that the money I gave was essential for the church to take care of the financial aspects, but my time, talents and abilities were essential in not only my journey as a follower of Christ, but the journey of others.

God has blessed each of us with unique talents and abilities that we must use to show others our faith and how they might be able to give in their own way. For some it may be faith, to another time, or money, or understanding, or kindness... Verse 11 says, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” As a Christian I must look at myself and ask, “What did the Lord give me that I can give back and most importantly, am I giving my fair share?”

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a talent that you have. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God how he wants to use your talents today.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Saturday, November 10th  -  Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

“24 “And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ’Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

26 “But his master answered and said to him, ’You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’” - Matthew 25:24-28

I am very blessed in many ways. Whether it’s a physical, mental or financial ability that I have been blessed with, I try to always remember that these are gifts from God. I am not actually the owner of these “talents” but more the caretaker. When I give time, money or effort while following Jesus it feeds that spiritual hunger that connects me to God. I’ve never missed anything I’ve given away when I use Jesus as my compass. Actually, it makes me feel more blessed.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a trust you’ve been given.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. What is God entrusting you with today?

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
November 11th Sunday School Lesson
Giving As an Act of Discipleship – Matthew 25:14-30

What is it about the word “stewardship” that causes Christians, strong, dedicated, committed, Bible believing Christians, to squirm in our seats, to crane our necks looking for the closest exit, and to check our watches constantly as we fidget during the “annual” stewardship sermon? Is it simply that after the sermons of Christ’s birth and his death and resurrection, the “stewardship” sermon is the next most usual sermon we hear? But we anticipate the first two sermons, at Christmas and Easter, with great joy. In fact most of us would be severely disappointed if those two holiday sermons passed and we didn’t hear those “oh so familiar” stories. So what is it about stewardship that gives us the “hebeegeebees?” It is Biblical after all. (Stewardship, not hebeegeebees!)

I freely admit that when Jayne asked me to write this lesson I frantically searched my mind for a reason or reasons why I couldn’t do it. I didn’t want to write about giving! But my calendar was clear (empty, bare). No trips to occupy my time, so here we are, a lesson on stewardship. And while certainly stewardship includes monetary giving, it also includes how we give of our time and talents too. At the end of the day, however, it is about giving and following Christ. And following Christ’s teachings is the definition of Discipleship. Our text is familiar.

Matthew 25:14-30

14 “For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19 “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’ 21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

22 “Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.’ 23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

24 “And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

26 “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’
"For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

As I said - a familiar parable to most of us, I'm sure. A wealthy man leaves on a journey and entrusts his servants with five, two, and one talent. I looked up talent and found it was a measure of weight in the neighborhood of 32 kilograms. As a use for currency the talent would have been of silver or gold. To put the gesture of the wealthy man in perspective, a talent of silver would be worth around $35,000 today and a talent of gold, $1,800,000. Suddenly it is a little easier to identify with the servant that got one talent when he says in verse 25, "So I was afraid." The third servant also says in verse 24, "I know that you are a hard (translates harsh) man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed." However, there is no evidence of the master being harsh. To the contrary, he is generous and giving; a shrewd business man, perhaps? It seems clear that he was, but harsh? I'm not so sure.

So what is it that sets the other two servants apart from the third? Why do the first two servants go "at once and put his money to work?" I would suggest that, in part, it is a better knowledge and understanding of the wealthy man and what was expected of them, a greater familiarity, if you will; a more intimate relationship.

Several key points occur to me as we consider this parable and stewardship:

1. The master gave to all of his servants. Verse 14 states, “...called his servants and entrusted his property to them.” All got some.
2. The master gave according to the ability of each one. (Vs 15)
3. Upon his return the master proceeded with an accounting.

Drawing parallels between us and the characters of the parable and the three points above, clearly God is the wealthy man and we are the servants, so:

1. What we have comes from God. The talents with which we've been entrusted may not be worth $1.8 million or $35,000 but we have been entrusted with talents, monetary for sure, but also abilities, gifts, and talents that we can use to further God’s kingdom.
2. We don’t all have the same talent or abilities or equal number of them. Some have very visible talents such as the ability to sing, play an instrument, or preach. Other talents are more subtle such as administration or organization, making sure things run smoothly.
3. There will be a day of reckoning as there was for the third servant. Therefore, we must take initiative and work. God blesses work. “Invest” in his kingdom by using those talents he's given.

An interesting concept regarding this is that Jesus says those who have, will receive more. I take that to mean if we use the talent we have now, then we may find out we have hidden talents, abilities we never thought about.

So how do we know what to do with what God has given and may give in the future in the way of talent, ability, or monetary blessings? I will go back to the paragraph about what separates the first two servants from the third? One contributing thought is simply greater intimacy with the master. Hmm ... greater intimacy with our Master...
As I said previously, when Jayne contacted me about this I didn’t have any time constraints that would “allow” me to say no...but I could have found some way to get out of it, I'm sure. I didn’t. The reason I didn’t was because the lesson was about stewardship – using talents that God has given. Saying no would have been on a similar level with burying a talent in the back yard because “I was afraid.” And I was. Sometimes we have to step outside that area of comfort in which we confine ourselves and when we do we have the chance to discover that “for everyone who has, will be given more, and he will have an abundance.” (vs 29)

Finally, please look at verse 13. Although this is part of the previous parable of the ten virgins, it sends a message of urgency that we need to spread our wings, perhaps, and seek new ways, new avenues to practice our stewardship. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour.” (Matthew 25:13) Our giving of our time, energy, abilities, talents, and yes, money has a “use by date” ... WE just don’t know what that expiration date is!

Reflections & Notes

Look back over the devotions, lesson and Blessings of a Giving God that you wrote down this week. Think about the sermon and your practice of the Generosity Experiment.

What have you learned about God’s generosity?
How have you been challenged in your own?
How do you need to trust in God more?
Week Three: Giving as an Act of Community

November 12-18, 2012

In God We Trust. In giving, we have a responsibility, not only to God, but to one another. God has made us to live in community. We are dependent on one another as the body of Christ. In 2 Corinthians we see that the Macedonians had great joy. The Corinthians had great wealth. The Macedonians needed money. The Corinthians needed to see God. A perfect match! Together, God has given us everything that we need. Together, we can fulfill God’s purpose.

The Scripture texts for our devotions this week show us what godly community looks like Along the Way as, In God We Trust. These texts are:

- Exodus 16:1-36 – How God provides when we are in need.
- Colossians 3:12-17 – How we are to be clothed in compassion and kindness.
- 1 Corinthians 12:21-31 – How we are dependent on one another.
- John 6:1-14 – How even the smallest gifts God blesses for the whole community.
- Acts 6:1-7 – How we share the work.

The Generosity Experiment:
When you say ‘yes’ this week as you put the Generosity Experiment into practice this week, let your ‘yes’ be an act of community. Say ‘yes,’ not because you feel charitable or the other person seems ‘worthy;’ say ‘yes’ because we belong to one another in Christ.

Consecration Sunday is this Sunday. Be in prayer this week as to what God is calling you to give as a part of the community of First Baptist Church.
Devotions on Giving as an Act of Community

Monday, November 12th - God Provides

Exodus 16:1-36

"2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction." - Exodus 16:2-4

God loves us too much to let us stay where we are and so He calls us into relationship with Him and into community with each other. On this journey, we move forward in hope and persevere through a faith which is dependent on God.

As scripture testifies, we are led out of captivity to restoration. Along the way, our life links up with others whose lives we touch each day. Through our willingness to give ourselves to each other, we advance the journey for all of us. As we extend grace and meet the needs of others, we create community.

In a book called, “The Connecting Church,” the writer, who has a child born without a left hand, illustrates this point. He recounts that one day his son’s Sunday School teacher, in talking about the church, used the familiar rhyme: “Here's the church, here's the steeple; open the doors and see all the people.” As she did so, she used her hands to work out the story and invited the children to do the same. She realized too late that the child without his left hand would not be able to join in the exercise. At that moment, however, a classmate and best friend said to the boy, “Let’s do it together.” The two boys then proceeded to join hands to simulate the church and steeple. The writer says, “This hand exercise should never be done again by an individual, because the church is not a collection of individuals, but the one body of Christ.”

When we join hands, by giving of our time, our talents, our resources, and our spiritual gifts, we imitate Christ, enjoy communion with the Father, and help build His Kingdom here and now.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ________________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps the help of a friend or neighbor. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

         As you pray, thank God for it. Praise God for the ways he meets your needs.
         Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.

29
Tuesday, November 13th - Clothed in Compassion & Kindness

Colossians 3:12-17

“12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

When Dad passed away, my husband and I flew to a small shipping community near Houston to collect his belongings and bring him home. Dad, a merchant seaman, was at sea most of the time, had a small place and we assumed not much for us to bring back. We didn't know any one there so, when we arrived, we asked a policeman for directions. He didn't just give us directions; he took the time to escort us to Dad's place. While we were working in the apartment, a neighbor came over to see if he could be of any help. The neighbor had been a friend to my father, working on his car and driving him around when he was too sick to drive himself.

The neighbor told us Dad had three storage units filled to the brim with things he was saving to put in the home he would have when he retired. Among the boxes were all kinds of souvenirs from the many countries he had visited. We were at a loss as to what we would do with so much! We thought about renting a truck but didn't know how we could ever load it ourselves. Dad's neighbor went to the local union hall and got about fifteen out of work merchant seamen to come help us. They didn't want any money; they just wanted to help the family of a fellow seaman. We went quickly through the boxes trying to determine what was in each one, but there were so many. As we worked alongside the men, we began to hear their story. Shipping had been bad for quite a while and most of them were on government assistance barely feeding their families. My husband and I decided we wanted to do something for these angels who had come to help us so we began saying things like, “We can't really use another set of dishes at home. Can any of you use them?” One by one a man would take something offering his thanks. It was like they were taking turns receiving a gift. I pulled out a leather purse asking if anyone had a use for a lady's hand bag. A young man came up and with tears in his eyes and said his wife didn't have a purse. He hugged the purse to his chest as he carried it away to a little pile of items he had stacked on the curb.

With our rental truck filled to the brim, Dad's affairs in order, we were ready to leave; but there was one more thing to take care of. What to do with Dad's car. The neighbor who had been so kind to us had just gotten out of prison and was out of work. His wife walked a long way to work every day. They had no vehicle. We gave the car to the neighbor.

We left that day with changed hearts. We had met many people from a very poor community who took the time to be kind to us. We gave them of what we had, but we were the ones blest by their compassion for strangers in need, generosity of their time, and the joy we saw in their faces as they worked beside us.
But the story didn't stop there. About six months later we received a phone call from the neighbor to say the car we had given him helped him get work and his wife had gotten a better job because they had transportation. He said meeting us had changed his life. We didn't change his life; it was God working that changed his life. About a year later a letter came to say they had just bought a small home. Their son had his own room.

That is real community, when we love one another. I can't help but think that God smiled that day at the storage units. We are so very thankful for the day that changed our hearts.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): __________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Maybe your small group or Sunday School class. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
As you pray, thank God for it. Hear God call you holy and beloved.
Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.

Consecration Sunday is this Sunday. Be in prayer this week as to what God is calling you to give as a part of the community of First Baptist Church.
Wednesday, November 14th - Dependent On One Another

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many.... 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

One definition of community is “a group or society helping each other.” We, the body of Christ, have come together as the “community” of First Baptist Church. All parts of the body are important to its function, just as each of us is important to the wellbeing of our community. Members are able to help the church in various ways through monetary gifts, skills, time and volunteering. Money is necessary to operate the buildings and pay the staff and, while very important, the buildings and staff alone cannot finish the work of the church. Some of us are able to use our skills, by building ramps for the elderly or cooking food for Tuesday noon service and the homeless, by serving on Wednesday nights or singing in the choir or praise band. Others might be skilled at visiting with elderly and homebound members or at teaching Sunday school or working with children on Wednesday nights. Others still might give of their time by being a volunteer at the church on Sunday mornings by ushering or working the sound board, keeping the nursery, leading a jail ministry or by giving a few hours a week at the Activities Center. Your personal involvement with your time, skills, gifts and resources serve to make our church strong and able to reach out to help others in our regional community. No one thing is more important to the flourishing of the church or to the body of Christ.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is the blessing of belonging.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God how you can bring unity, and not division, today.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Thursday, November 15th - Giving What We Have to Give

John 6:1-14

“After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). 2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?” 6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. 7 Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little.” 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, 9 “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?” 10 Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. 12 When they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.” 13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

There are several observations about this story that remind us of the importance of being aware of the needs of others and offering whatever we have to help meet those needs.

Jesus has attracted thousands of people who have heard or seen him healing the sick and teaching the gospel. They are drawn to him for physical and spiritual needs. Jesus is aware of their needs and asks the disciples how they can supply the masses with food— for he knows that they are, or will be, hungry. Our Lord demonstrated the attentive heart that reaches out to others even before they reach out to him.

There is a boy present that apparently offers what little he has for their use— two fish and a few loaves of bread. He did not offer these out of abundance but out of kindness. He must have known that his gift was way too small to make a dent in the needs of the thousands who were present, but he turn it over to Jesus anyway. It’s amazing what our small gifts can do for others when turned over to our Lord.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ______________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps someone noticed you were hurting. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to make you attentive to the needs of others.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Friday, November 16th - Sharing the Work

Acts 6:1-7

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” - Acts 6:1-4

How often do you find yourself not being able to say “NO”! Why is that? Is it because you don't want to let others down? Is it because you want to seem like the busiest person in town? Is it because no one can do a better job than you can? I am sure that we have all felt like this, but what happens when we spread ourselves too thin? Are we really giving each opportunity our best, or are we just giving enough so that we can move onto the next thing.

God has made us all unique in the gifts that he has given us. May we understand what those gifts are and use them to enrich our community without allowing ourselves to get burned out. Just like the disciples, we have to focus on the opportunities that God has created especially for us and be willing to allow others to accept the opportunities that God has in store for them. God then receives the best from all of us which makes a difference in our church, the community, and around the world.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): __________________________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is meaningful work to do.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
As you pray, thank God for it. Pray for those with whom you work today.
Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Saturday, November 17th - Sharing Community

Acts 4:32-37

"32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.” - Acts 4:32-35

We give for a lot of reasons: Guilt (pictures of starved children on TV), mandatory (we know it's expected of us), spontaneity (they asked for spare change and you were in a good mood), or because we're just genuinely good people.

The giving displayed in this passage, however, goes beyond that. The believers, whose numbers had grown dramatically in a short period of time, were bonded in belief and action. They gave as people had need. It was not a requirement to be in the community; they did it because they were a community. The passage says God's grace was powerfully at work in them. Giving was natural because grace-filled people do gracious things.

I have it and you need it? Here you go.

Giving in a community, where we are “one in heart and mind”, doesn't mean giving away. It means giving towards the people and the needs in our life, so that, together, we can continue to be united in one purpose like the early church.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ____________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary' blessing in the space above. Perhaps the blessing of abundant grace.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to deepen your experience of community.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.

Consecration Sunday is Tomorrow. Be in prayer as to what God is calling you to give as a part of the community of First Baptist Church.
November 18th Sunday School Lesson
Giving as an Act of Community – Acts 4:32-37

Acts 4:32-37

"32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

36 Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet."

Community in the Early Church

Before we look at our main scriptures for today, let’s take a look at what had been happening to his followers after the resurrection of Christ. The day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit had increased the number of believers by 3000. (Acts 2:47) Then in Acts 2:4, we read, “But many who heard the message believed and the number of men grew to 5000.” Notice the word men is used indicating there may have been many more including women and children. No matter how you look at the numbers, it was a large group of people. A community is not just a group of people. There are certain qualities that a true community shares. So how and why did these people become a community and what special qualities existed in their community of believers?

Let us now look at our main scriptures for today and answer the question above.

Acts 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but shared everything they had.

Have you ever been in a group of people that were one in heart and mind? Can you imagine a group of people that shared all of their possessions with those in the group? Why would these early Christians have this kind of care and concern for each other? Rob Bell, in his book Velvet Elvis, describes the reason this kind of community worked at that time.

“To try to prove there was an empty tomb wouldn’t have gotten very far with the average Roman citizen of the Roman Empire; they had heard it all before. This is why so many passages about the early church deal with possessions and meals and generosity. They understood that people were rarely persuaded by arguments, but more often by experiences. Living, breathing, flesh-and-blood experiences of the resurrection community were seen by others. They saw it as their responsibility to put Jesus’ message on display. To the outside world, it was less about proving and more about inviting people to experience this community of Jesus’ followers themselves.”

Flannery O’Connor wrote: “Our beliefs are not what we see; they are the light by which we see.” These early Christians were living in the light of the resurrection and they wanted others to join them.
Acts 4:33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

With resurrection comes much grace and power. The willingness of everyone to share with others more than covered the needs of all in the group. Grace brings the Kingdom of God to earth. They were living in the awareness and response to much grace.

William Willimon wrote: “The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is not an empty tomb or a well-orchestrated pageant on Easter Sunday, but rather a group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds community, that there can be no explanation other than that something decisive has happened in history.”

Acts 4:34-35 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, and brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Those early Christians knew that there could be no real community when people in a position to alleviate the needs of others refuse to do so. As long as there were people in need, the community was not whole. Generosity even reached to the point where some sold their houses and property to donate to the needs of the church. No one forced them to do this. They were moved by a sense of responsibility and concern for others. They were living in the light of the resurrection.

Acts 4:36-37 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement) 37: sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

We hear about Barnabas in the New Testament but not as much as we do about Peter and Paul, but he was influential in the growth of the Church. This act of generosity on his part was done because he wanted to share with others. He did this also to be an example for others. We continue to hear about Barnabas and his quiet encouragement as we follow him through the New Testament.

Just to take a note of what happens next, let me call two names, Ananias and Sapphira. I mention them only to show a contrast between Barnabas and this couple. I will rely on the words of Fredrick Buechner, "Lying to God is like sawing the branch you are sitting on. The better job you do, the harder you fall." Enough said.

The most beautiful description I have ever read on community comes from Henri Nouwen’s book Can you Drink the Cup?

“Community is like a large mosaic. Each little piece seems so insignificant. One piece is bright red, another cold blue or dull green, another warm purple, another sharp yellow, another shining gold. Some look precious, others ordinary. Some look valuable, others are worthless. Some look gaudy, others delicate. As individual stones, we can do little with them except compare them and judge their beauty and value. When, however, all these little stones are brought together in one big mosaic portraying the face of Christ, who would ever question the importance of all of them? If one of them is missing, the face is incomplete. Together in the one mosaic, each little stone is indispensable and makes a unique contribution to the glory of God. That’s community, a fellowship of little people who together make God visible in the world.”
We need each other to live in community. Let us challenge ourselves as a church to live in community and in the light of the resurrection power, with much grace. How awesome it is to work together to bring the Kingdom of God to earth now, and in the future! Together as the kind of community that Henri Nouwen describes nothing can stop us, not even the gates of Hell.

**Reflections & Notes**

Look back over the devotions, lesson and **Blessings of a Giving God** that you wrote down this week. Think about the sermon and your practice of the **Generosity Experiment**.

- What have you learned about God’s generosity?
- How have you been challenged in your own?
- How do you need to trust in God more?
Week Four: Giving as an Act of Mission

November 19-25, 2012

In God We Trust. Giving is the fuel for mission to take place. It moves us beyond our community into the world; the world that God so loved and died for. When we give as an act of mission, we participate in the living out of Jesus' prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, one earth as it is in heaven."

So often we give, thinking we are bringing Jesus to those in need. In reality, we give, and we find our deepest need - Jesus himself - among those we've been called to serve.

The Scripture texts for our devotions this week call us into the world Along the Way as, In God We Trust. These texts are:

- Philippians 4:10-14 – The call to give our lives away.
- Colossians 1:3-14 – The call to every good work.
- Mark 12:38-44 – The call to sacrificial giving.
- Matthew 28:16-20 – The call to go into all the world.
- Matthew 25:31-40 – The call to the least of these.

The Generosity Experiment:
When you say ‘yes’ this week as you put the Generosity Experiment into practice this week, let your ‘yes’ be an act of mission. Say ‘yes,’ not because you feel charitable or the other person seems ‘worthy;’ say ‘yes’ as God's missionary in the world.

Mission at FBC
Devotions on Giving as an Act of Mission

Monday, November 19th - Giving Our Lives Away

Philippians 4:10-14

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction." - Philippians 4:10-14

Have you ever heard the expression "You can't out give God"? Have you ever tried it? To out give GOD?

It didn't start out that way, but by the end of the summer my lesson in discovering what it is like to have need and what it is like to have plenty was consuming me, and beginning to take shape as a lifestyle of worship within me. I was headed into a new direction, guided by an intentional act of purpose of God's own charge and control. He was proving himself to me that I could trust him, no matter what...He was going to meet me more than halfway.

A few years earlier, I had prepared the very last bit of food for my sons and while they were playing in their rooms after their meal, I was cleaning up the kitchen and discussing with God about their next two meals and asking Him what was I to feed them for dinner the next night, when I heard a knock on my door. There was a man whom I had never met, but knew he lived a few houses down from us, standing there. He identified himself and then spoke these words, "I've come to take you to the grocery store." Not having any money and knowing there was no more food in the house, I gathered the boys and off we went this man. And he did just that; he took us to the store and purchased a cart full of food for us. Any and all selfishness that was in me went away at that moment. God had my full attention and over the next couple of years He began teaching me to give myself away. Over and over He would meet each need we had, once was a tank of gas that lasted two weeks, and that was including 12 round trips from Kure Beach to New Hanover High School so the boys could have a way home from sports they were playing. And then the summer I mentioned earlier; that was when I really learned that with plenty or with nothing, the recipe for happiness, true inner peace and happiness and satisfaction in God became alive in me.

More and more opportunities opened up for me to help others, giving myself away, sharing everything with anyone, whether I knew them or not, it doesn’t matter. My love to help others grew and grew and grew and the more I gave, the more we have. Life being lived simply gives more time to share with others, allows more gifts of money to give away, the talents and skills God created in me flow to help others...Paul states in this passage that he doesn’t have a sense for needing anything personally and I thank God that I can say that as well.

One day as we were driving home from football practice, one of my sons stated this truth about our lives, "Mom, we sure do have a lot of riches not to have money." And I think he stated it well. Being
on mission to give everything away is a true act of intentional living for Christ, and I wouldn't want to live any other way! (I did have to promise the boys that I would not give their beds away again. I thought they wouldn’t notice while off at college. I was wrong.)

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a blessing of contentment.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to help you want what you already have.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Tuesday, November 20th - Every Good Work

Colossians 1:3-14

“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” - Colossians 1:9-14

When I think of the word mission, I have always felt that a good definition would be "someone sent out on a duty." After reading these verses, I got a different perspective on what mission work might be. Even though God loves us all the time, it seems these verses are saying there are things we can do to increase God's pleasure with us. These verses refer to bearing fruit in good works, growing in the knowledge of our God, and having patience and endurance; but the last one, joyfully giving thanks to our Father, made me think about how giving can be considered as mission work.

As I thought about this, I came to the conclusion that we can give thanks to God in many ways—verbally, physically and monetarily. We can sing and praise God and tell others about Him and His love; we can physically go on mission trips to other countries or even work for His cause here at home, and we can give of our resources to help those less fortunate. Giving of ourselves and what we have can definitely be an act of mission—we don't have to be sent out on a duty, we just have to live for Him each day.

I once heard a saying that went like this -:"a missionary is not someone that has to cross the sea, but one that sees the cross." Today, I hope the cross will be your guide as you do your mission work.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is the blessing of family. Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to help you to ‘walk worthy’ today.

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.

42
Wednesday, November 21st - The Widow’s Mite

Mark 12:38-44

"41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

The world today is full of uniquely skilled and talented individuals. It's incredible the feats we have accomplished using these abilities of ours mixed in with a little determination. The building of the Panama Canal, which is revered as one of the greatest engineering achievements in modern day history, putting a man on the moon 50+ years ago, the light bulb and yes, sliced bread, to name a few. But do these marvels of accomplishment fulfill our commitment, our obligation of stewardship towards our fellow man? What are we responsible for in this world, this life?

Stewardship bears a heavy burden at times. It means you are ethically responsible for managing and caring for things such as the environment, economics, health, property, information, religion and even mankind. Christian stewardship takes it a bit further. There isn't a soft obligation here; it is a commandment by the Son of God to put others before ourselves, love them as Christ loved us.

Have you ever thought about the skills and talents that come so easy to you? Where do they come from and why do you have them? Is it for personal success or accomplishment over a lifetime? Do you imagine yourself being heaved up on the shoulders of your peers carried off life's playing field in a victorious celebration? Though we have all imagined that at times, we aren't on this planet for us and we aren't spectacularly talented for self gain. We are here for someone else, maybe hundreds or thousands of others.

Everyone in this life has a purpose and it's guaranteed it will involve someone else along the way. Your purpose also will involve one of the pillars of being a Christian steward...giving. You will have to give your time, talents, skills, sweat, blood and money. It will cost you something.

Mark 12: 38-44 describes two types of people who "give" and, no doubt, we have been both at times. You have the teachers of the law who walk around with flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplace. They want the praise and recognition, the coveted social status and places of honor. They want others to see their pain and suffering and listen to their silver-tongued prayers. Then you have the poor widow who tithed less than a fraction of a penny. Who has put more into the treasury? Who gave out of their wealth and who gave out of poverty when every cent counted?

The God we believe in understands costs. His Son understands stewardship. Giving is our mission...and it will cost us. But the cost is well worth the reward we receive in this life and definitely the next. May God bless us with the faith of the poor widow, may He bless us with extraordinary talent to help others in their faith journey, may we receive the blessing of Christian stewardship and may He bless us with the opportunity to use a gift that every human being has...the art of giving.
Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps the blessing of a godly mentor.
   Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
   As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God who looks to you as a mentor and example.
   Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Thursday, November 22th - The Great Commission – From the Inside Out

Matthew 28:16-20

"But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The Great Commission reminds us that we were sent here with a purpose. God's Word gives us gentle nudges that ought to shoot us into active response. When I think about stewardship, I tend to peer a bit deeper into my everyday commitments and priorities. What are my goals and motives? Who am I truly living for? Does my life song sing out for His glory?

Stewardship season is a great time to consider these questions. To recognize the ways that we are fulfilling and living out His purpose for our lives. It is also a time to reconsider the areas in our life that perhaps might need some adjusting. We all have countless opportunities each day to live out the Great Commission, being good stewards of our time, gifts, talents and resources. We simply have to start from the inside out.

"We seldom realize fully that we are sent to fulfill God-given tasks. We act as if we were simply dropped down in creation and have to decide to entertain ourselves until we die. But we were sent into the world by God, just as Jesus was. Once we start living our lives with that conviction, we will soon know what we were sent to do.” - Henri Nouwen

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ____________________________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is the blessing of a calling.
  Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
  As you pray, thank God for it. Ask God to transform you from the inside out.
  Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.

Happy Thanksgiving!

*May all of your ‘ordinary’ Blessings of our Giving God feel extraordinary!*
Friday, November 23rd - Great Generosity

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God... 12 For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” - 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 12

I asked myself the following questions as I reflected upon the scripture passage for today.

*If you were to measure your passion for following Jesus based on your checkbook/use of time/energy exerted, would you be close enough to see Jesus?

*If someone else examined the way you use your money, time and energy, would they get a glimpse of Jesus in you?

The Apostle Paul was writing this letter to a church with incredible resources. They were on the brink of becoming a church that would bless the people living in their region and send out missionaries to proclaim the Good News of God’s grace manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in order to provide hope and light for people around the world that were living in darkness. But, they needed the encouragement from a much smaller congregation that was practicing an extravagant giving to God by choosing to put God first so Paul told them of the Macedonian churches. Tiny in number and small in attendance, the generosity of the churches of Macedonia served as the impetus to inspire a much larger and diverse congregation to “dig deeper” into their pockets, schedules and giftedness in order to further God’s Kingdom on earth.

In the twenty years that I have been a part of our church, I have been impressed by our generosity when challenged but know all along that we could do more. There are needs that exist but because our church is large we assume someone else is meeting the need. Some of us wait to be asked to give/participate/lead and others of us turn down the invitations because we think someone else would/could give more and be better than us at doing what we are asked to do. Sadly, we miss the blessing and so does our church. Like those of the Macedonian churches, I intend to “plead for the privilege of sharing in service” and “give as much as I am able” of my money, time, talent and energy to furthering God’s Kingdom through my church. Will you join me?

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4): ____________________________

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps the blessing of encouragement.

Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.

As you pray, thank God for it. Plead, this day, for the “privilege of sharing in service.”

Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
Saturday, November 24th - You Did It To Me

Matthew 25:31-40

“37 Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40 The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” - Matthew 25:37-40

In this passage Jesus tells his followers a story about the day when they will gather before him to enter heaven, and he is telling them that they will enter heaven because they’ve taken such good care of him. When we do these things for others who really need them, when we feed the hungry and take care of the sick, we are doing these things for him. Jesus’ story helps us to remember that we do God’s work every day and that we never quite know all the places we meet him.

How is giving (time, skills/gifts, money) an act of mission to you?

Giving of my time helping others makes me feel good about myself. Giving clothing or food to help people in need or giving money to build a home in Guatemala makes me happy because when I do good things for other people here on earth......I am actually doing these things for my Father God. I have so much to be thankful for in my life and I pray every day, thanking God for all my blessings and my family that loves me unconditionally. I’m happily on a mission to help or volunteer a couple hours of my time every week just like it is my mission to be at FBC every Sunday because it makes me feel connected with my church family.

Dear God,
Help us to remember that we do your work on Earth as we take care of others in need.
Amen.

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Blessings of a Giving God (see p.4):

Write your ‘ordinary’ blessing in the space above. Perhaps it is a blessing of compassion.
Hold a penny in your hand. Let it represent that ordinary blessing.
As you pray, thank God for it. Ask that you might see Christ in those you serve.
Place the penny in your jar as an offering of gratitude.
November 25th Sunday School Lesson  
Giving as an Act of Mission – Matthew 25:31-40

What does the word stewardship mean to you?

What does it mean to be a steward of God?

Reviewing the definition of stewardship may bring a little more insight into our responsibility of being a steward of God. In a stewardship relationship there are two parties. One is the owner of the resources and the other is the steward who is entrusted to invest those resources. Stewardship is most often described as the responsibilities delegated by the master.

What responsibilities has God given us during our lifetime?

Let’s start in the beginning, literally. In Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” To better understand our responsibilities as a steward we must meditate on the fact that God is the master and creator of everything. Although this may appear to be basic understanding, we must really dive into what that means in terms of the gifts, time, and talents God has bestowed upon each of us. Everything we have and everything we are is a blessing from God. God has entrusted these gifts to us during our time here on earth to glorify his kingdom. We are called to use the time and talents God provides and invest them in the life that he has granted.

What has God entrusted to you?

How do you invest what God has entrusted to you?

“The more we reflect upon the majesty of God in creation  
and the more we take to heart what God has created us to be,  
the more we will live each moment of each day in response to our high calling as divine stewards.”

- Mark D. Roberts

God has bestowed upon us more grace and more blessings than we truly deserve. We are called as Christians to bestow the same grace and blessings on all of God’s people. We are stewards of this grace and love from God.

How can we be the stewards God has called us to be in all areas of our life?

Family? Church? Work? Community?

The Final Judgment - Matthew 25:31-40

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.
"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'"

In the days leading up to his crucifixion, Jesus’ shares this parable with his disciples. This emphasizes the importance this lesson plays in the life of Jesus’ followers. The last sentence wraps everything up nicely. “I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!”

How easy is it to see family, friends, neighbors, and strangers as the body of Christ?

How would our daily activities change if we truly saw every person we encountered as a child of God? It would be hard to pass by the homeless, ignore the hungry, overlook the thirsty, and deny the helpless.

Do you pass up opportunity to use your talents for the glory of the Lord?

Has God called you to share your blessings with others?

How did you recognize that calling?

How did you respond?

A Call to Generous Giving - 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

"Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease
Money is commonly associated with the word stewardship. Although money plays a part, there are many other factors that are associated with a generous heart. I can’t help but reflect on the joy and generosity of a child when reading this passage. If we can focus on the idea that we are “children of God” I think our role in this life is more clearly determined. Most small children have little understanding of monetary value, but seem to understand the joy of giving at an early age. I am reminded of a time when my son brought me a wilted weed from the yard, with a joy that could not be contained. It was such a heartfelt gesture that it nearly brought tears to my eyes. The gift was surely not something I had been looking for, but the generosity and joy that was shared with the gift was so beautiful. The concept that he gave what he had to show his love can so easily be related to the passage above from 2 Corinthians. As children of God we are called to give what we have, with a joyful heart. It doesn’t get much better than seeing the smile on my son’s face as I reveal my joy over the gift he has shared. If we could imagine the joy God experiences when we give what we have, how could we ever pass up an opportunity to help anyone?

Reflections & Notes

Look back over the devotions, lesson and Blessings of a Giving God that you wrote down this week. Think about the sermon and your practice of the Generosity Experiment.

What have you learned about God’s generosity?
How have you been challenged in your own?
How do you need to trust in God more?