I. Introduction:

Do you keep track of your time?
How many hours a week do you work? sleep? play? watch television? Worship or give other time to the church?

Fellow the money! What does this mean to you?

Do you have a budget that you can review?
When you review your budget what percent goes towards housing? car? vacation? What is your church contribution?

Where we spend our money shows our priorities. Is your church contribution at least the same as your car payment or boat payment?

Do you want to be assessed for entry into heaven by an accounting of your timecard or checkbook?

Does time and money come last or first in regards to church?

III. Generosity / Extravagant Generosity:

When each of us joins the Methodist Church what question is ask of us?

"Will you be loyal to the Methodist Church and uphold it with your prayers, presence, gifts and service?"

How then does this question relate to our lesson today? Lets begin with defining generosity.

Definition

**generosity** gen·er·os·i·ty (NOUN) [Latin *generositas* < *generosus*]
1. kindness: willingness to give money, help, or time freely
2. substantial size: pleasingly large size or quantity

Thesaurus
Synonyms: kindness, big-heartedness, liberality, charity
Antonyms: selfishness, self-centeredness, stinginess

While we are going to concentrate on giving money and even tithing to the church, we cannot forget that our time, prayers and talents are important too.

From our devotional book Cultivating Fruitful Practices
Bishop Schnaze helps us understand generosity and extravagant generosity.

Generosity describes the Christian's unselfish willingness to give as an act of our love of GOD in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ. Generous living is not just about giving money, or even just about giving. It has to do with the whole of who we are and how we care for our neighbors (see Mark 12:28-31). In other words, it is how we steward 100 percent of our lives, not just the "religious" sector.

Extravagant Generosity in the early church was described as selling all ones possessions and giving the proceeds to the widows, orphans, sick, and poor. Extravagant generosity today describe the practices of sharing and giving that exceeds all expectations and extends to unexpected measures in order to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ.

III. What Does the Bible Say?

The Bible offers more than 500 verses on prayer less than 500 on faith but more than 2000 on money and possessions. In the Gospels one of every 10 verses deals with finances

Old Testament
Leviticus 27:30-32  A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD.... Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the LORD.

(Genesis 14:20b  And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

These verses help establish the he tithe at 10% of everything.

Psalms 116:1-14  GOD is the real giver.  From whom all blessings flow" are the words of the Doxology that we sing every service. The Psalmist tries to give meaning to this phrase. He begins by saying "I love the LORD because...." vv, 1-2: listening ear
vv, 3-4: helping me through the tough times

vv, 5-6: protects me

vv, 7: gives me peace

vv, 8-11: keeps me on tract so I can go the distance

vv, 12: Then he asked a very key question—What can I offer the LORD for all he has done for me? These scriptures offer a response to GOD's generosity of gratitude and joyful obedience, giving with love because we know who gave first.

Proverbs 3:9 “Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce.” Old testament law requires that the people offer GOD choice sacrifices that are the best of their flocks. But the temptation is to give blind, crippled or diseased animals. Do we honor God with first fruits or what is left over? Does this reflect our relationship and or commitment to HIM?

Exodus 35:5 “Take from among you an offering to the LORD; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the LORD’s offering: gold, silver, and bronze.” Story of the unexpected expenses at a church and the response.(ref) Finally received more than was needed for the repairs. There is no end to what the church can accomplish for the purposes of Christ when the sharp awareness of the assets, resources, and talents that GOD entrusts to us supercedes the fear of scarcity and the obsessive focus on needs and problems. Extravagant Generosity means graciously and responsibly placing ourselves and our resources in GOD's service.

New Testament

1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Give with regularity.

Galatians 6:6-10; 4 Each Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load.

Mark 12:43; 43 Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.

We are called to give proportional to what we have and not all giving the same amount.

The same sacrifice.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should
give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

Generosity is encouraged. How would behavior change in our congregation if everyone took these words seriously? How would “sowing bountifully” affect us?

1 John 4: 9-10. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

What extraordinary and unexpected acts of generosity have you experienced or seen?

My story of Jack Lord

2Corinthians 8:3-4 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations...

Every sanctuary and chapel in which we have worshipped, every church organ that lifted our spirits, every kitchen where we have shared a meal every church van that has taken us on a trip - all the fruits of someone’s extravagant generosity. We have been the recipients of grace upon grace.

We are the beneficiaries of someone who came before us. Exercise Room of Harry Clark. How do we repay these debts that cannot be repaid. We can only give forward. We can honor and recognize those that preceded us, when we plant a shade tree that we do not expect to sit under.

Extravagant generosity is not just about the church’s needs but more about Christians need to give. Generosity is an essential quality of spiritual maturity and growth. Generosity is a fruit of the spirit and a worthy spiritual aspiration.
Luke 12:20  "But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

Vibrant churches teach, preach, and practice proportional giving with the goal of tithing. We grow in grace with giving which is essential practice for all Christian disciples. This is the need we have to give as disciples of Christ. We see ourselves as having abundance rather fearing scarcity. We give joyously, generously and consistently in ways that enrich us and strengthens the ministries of the church. As people grow in relationship to Christ, they grow in the practice of Extravagant generosity, offering more of themselves for the purposes of Christ, and providing resources that strengthen ministry and that help the church touch the lives of more and more people in the same way that our own lives have been transformed by GOD.

Timothy 6:18-19) “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

A philosophy based on materialism, acquisitions, and possessions is not sufficient to live by or to die by. Proportional giving and tithing force us to look at our earnings, savings, and spending through GOD's eyes. Giving generously prioritizes lives and helps us to distinguish what is lasting, eternal and infinite in value from what is temporary, illusionary and untrustworthy. All things belong to GOD. As Christians we are entrusted to be stewards to use all that we have in ways that glorify GOD. What we earn belongs to GOD. It should be earned honestly and serve purposes consistent with being followers of Christ. What we spend belongs to GOD and we should spend it wisely. What we save belongs to GOD. It should be invested wisely. What Christians give belongs to God and we should give conscientiously, generously and even extravagantly to strengthen the body of Christ. Do you tithe? If not, what scares you about it.

Happiness based on possessions causes people to pursue a receding goal, leaving them dissatisfied, wanting more, and never able to satiate their desires. Mirages are never found! They always move just to the next horizon.

Not only a duty to give as Christians but Christians have a need to give. How well are we doing at teaching the importance of stewardship and the Christian’s need to give?

Read aloud the quotation: “We buy things we don’t even need with money we don’t even have to impress people we don’t even know.” In our community and in our congregation, what signs do you see that there are people caught in a cycle of spending and debt? Living well "beyond our means."

What can the church do to help people succeed managing their financial resources?

IV. Discussion and Summary
What are your views on tithing?
Is it a gift or a tax?
Is it intended as a floor or ceiling of giving?
Is it really GOD's to begin with?

Some Christians claim tithing as part of the Law of Moses, ended with Christ (Romans 10:4). Jesus is the completion of the Law, the culmination of the Law, the "Perfect Man" to whom the Law pointed. The Law as the "school master" (Galatians 3:24) shows the validity of the tithe is found in the Law.

The enthusiasm of 1st Century Jerusalem Christians for giving and giving beyond their means was common. In response to "Over-giving" the Biblical tithe can actually be understood as a limiting guideline (a ceiling) on the giving. In other words, the tithe serves as a guiding limitation on giving, far from being a demand for a minimum (a floor) tithe.

What becomes clear is that when Christians are motivated by God's Grace, they will give beyond any need that the Church might have. Story raising more money than we need for unexpected repairs.(ref)

Giving is an act of faith; it's not a matter of "do this to be saved" but, rather, "the saved, empowered by God's Grace, deeply desire do this."

Tithing is both an expression of the Schoolmaster-function of the Law and a Means of Grace when exercised as faith-action. As a component of the Law, it teaches us that we are not to give all of our possessions, all of our "good things," all of our money and resources ... but that a set proportion is sufficient. One may, of course, go beyond this set amount as offerings of thanksgiving, and sweet savor, but the consistent pattern of giving is based on a set portion of one's income. As an act of faith, it connects us to God's Grace.

Some might say they cannot afford to tithe, but in truth none of us can really afford not to tithe. When we tithe we are returning to God that which is already His. All that we have and all that we are comes from GOD. How can we withhold that 10% of not only our money, but also uphold our faith with our prayers, presence, and service? The blessings of God's Grace, when we act in Faith, are just too precious to ignore.

Simply, Christian giving should be:

"Cheerful" as an expression of the Holy Spirit.
An indispensable component of faithful life
A Sacrificial expression of thanksgiving for all that we have received.
"Methodical," regular giving according to a plan, or a schedule, not haphazardly or inconsistently.
Closing Prayer

Gracious GOD, Thank you for the extravagant gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to offer us new life.

Let us honor YOUR amazing grace with our presence, prayers, gifts and talents.

Dear GOD take control of our lives by providing your direction, guidance, wisdom, and blessing!

Remind us to uphold YOU by doing good, by showing generosity and by being ready to share with those in need.

Teach us Christ-centered generosity so that we may give according to our means, and even beyond, for the joy of ministering to others and giving to those in need.

Help us to overcome our fears and uncertainties to become joyful givers and to be free from too much concern for our possessions.

Make us optimistic and hopeful, by remembering with certainty that all things are possible with Christ.

Lead us to Extravagant Generosity so that we may bring more and more people into the body of Christ.

We give you thanks LORD for enriching our lives through our giving.

Let us not dwell on what is worldly and finite but on what is eternal.

May all that we do not be for our pride but for your glory—and yours alone.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen