

## MEEKER CHRISTIAN CHURCH July 31, 2022 STEWARDSHIP

Scripture: 2 Cor 9:6-11 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a **cheerful** giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, 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: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his 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 made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. NIV*

Look again at the last part of verse 7 "God loves a **cheerful** giver." My silly mind produced a vision of everybody laughing and giggling during the offering time like the kids at VBS when they received and were playing with the toy cameras! In fact those kids were modeling a right response for the attitude of stewardship!

CHEER, CHEERFUL, CHEERFULLY, CHEERFULNESS is translated from the Greek word *hilaros* NT:2431, which comes from the base word *hileos* which means "propitious" and signifies that readiness of mind, that joyousness, which is prompted to do anything. In English we can also translate it as "hilarious", or in our scripture verse 2 Cor 9:7 we can legitimately translate it as, "God loves a hilarious giver."

A great contrast might be when you finally get to purchase something that you had been wanting, planning for and finally could acquire – you experienced a heart felt response of cheerfulness or outright hilarity. Just as a Christian grows in faith and personal relationship with the Lord, so we grow in faith and hilarity in stewardship.

It is like the joy one feels when you watch your children or grand kids unwrap a present you have carefully shopped for and given them – they squeal with delight! And then cast the gift aside to play with the box it was in! Hilarity is one part of that moment!!

We can certainly never go wrong by studying the words of Jesus on any given subject and so we examine Matthew 6:19-24 with HIS poignant instruction: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Or another way of saying it is stuff accumulated on earth last only for a finite time while stuff accumulated in heaven lasts forever.*

An essential point of understanding when it comes to stewardship is that money is just one aspect of the greater meaning of the word. Stewardship has application in every aspect of life. For instance, for your meditation think about this – God created in six days and rested the seventh day. Here is the question: What percentage of time did God model in stewardship at the time of creation? The answer is 14.285%. Is there a lesson to be learned and applied for practicing stewardship in that model? You and the Holy Spirit work that out.

Now let's look at some definition of terms to be sure we are communicating clearly:

1. Stewardship is taking care of all things that God has given a person or family. Money being only one part of it. Time, talents, all resources, energy etc. are all part of stewardship.
2. The term and discussion of tithes refers to 10%.
3. Offerings is the giving that is above the 10% tithe.
4. Windfall in my vocabulary refers to unexpected money or resources that are as a friend recently expressed to me, "an unexpected check from out of nowhere." What he was implying it was a gift God orchestrated from the circumstances of life that was unexpected. It is a testimony to their faith how generous they are with their offerings of those windfall dollars.

Yes there is a scriptural command to tithe! The command comes from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy 14:22 *Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.* And another in Leviticus 27:30 *A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.* Yet another wording of the command for a tithe is in Malachi 3:10-12 *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the Lord Almighty. 12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.* NIV

You might legitimately be thinking: "Jim, you read only O.T. scripture - does that mean tithing is not commanded in the N.T.?" Let's see how Jesus deals with that question:

Matthew 5:17-20 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

IT SURE SOUNDS LIKE JESUS REINFORCED THE TITHE, what do you think?

Also, do you remember the comments of Jesus to the Pharisees in MAT 23:23-24? *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.*

Jesus complimented them for their tithing, but chastised them for failing the weightier matters of faith and love.

Stewardship also represents one of the great mysteries in the Bible – though it is a faith truism that can only be discovered by practice: regarding the tithe, here it is: -- 90% is more than 100% because it is holy unto the Lord. That is what faith is - taking God at His word and living accordingly. Mathematically 90% is less than 100% with the exception of this faith truism that tithing results in God's outpouring of blessings and 90% ends up greater than 100% because of God's blessings! Remember Lev 27:30? *A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.* God does not need it – it's all His anyway. Mankind needs to be obedient for their fullness of life so God can give His blessings.

**Here is another faith truism for your brain to work on: What we do not give of our tithe to the Lord for earthly ministry to build up His kingdom, is used by the devil for his evil ministry to tear down that kingdom.**

Stewardship then implies a plan for giving; remember everything belongs to God in the first place and we are only caretakers of what He has seen fit to entrust to us through our individual talents/gifts and resources. Matthew 25:14-30 and the parable of the talents is an example you can look up.

Here is an explanation to consider in stewardship of financial resources; - the tithe goes to the local congregation. After the tithe then the offering is for other ministries or direct help. Windfall is applied with the offering.

Here are some scriptural helps for making stewardship priorities:

1. Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* In context that is referencing food, clothing, shelter and provisions for the family.
2. 1 TI 5:8 *If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*
3. 2 Timothy 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to GOD as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*
4. Education, investment, leisure time those other things provided for in the scripture which in a phrase means - BUDGET YOUR INCOME.

For a more in depth study, trace our Christian heritage to Abraham in Galatians 3; then examine our obligations from that heritage in Hebrews 7.

Start your giving somewhere, not for God's good but for yours! Start giving with the attitude of hilarious generosity!// Giving is a major personal evaluation of spiritual maturity as taught in LUKE 6:37 *"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. **Give, and it will be given to you.** A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Stewardship sometimes starts with tithing immediately when believers come under the conviction of the HOLY SPIRIT, others gradually move into that position over a few months. The point is that giving is as much a part of the Christian heritage and experiences as being a good citizen, an honest and moral person.

The church must trust the Lord that those person making up His local congregation are to be growing in the blessing of stewardship by tithing and offerings. That means church leadership must conscientiously pray and faithfully manage money of which they are entrusted. With that in mind let me draw your attention to the most recent Treasurer's report inserted into the bulletin with a couple of explanations: The Trust Account on the bottom line was accumulated primarily from the sale of the former parsonage a few years ago when it was no longer needed. Secondly is the General Fund that fluctuates with the monthly income and expenses as illustrated in the June expenses.// By the way everyone is welcome to attend the monthly board meeting as publicized in the announcements if you have questions. Which by the way is next week following the morning service.

One final thing this morning – I know some of you are already tithing and receiving the corresponding blessings from the Lord and have understood that for you 90% is greater than 100%. I commend you for your faithfulness and humble hilarity, this congregation could not continue without you. But I also know some are satisfied that the church has financial resources and doesn't really need their tithe in these financially delicate times. I pray the Holy Spirit will be your guide as you go to the Heavenly father in prayer.

1 John 4:19, *"We love because he first loved us"*. That's why we give, why we grow in stewardship. 1 John 4:19, *"We love because he first loved us"*. That is why we give out of gratitude for a gift that money can't buy. The gift of salvation and eternal life in heaven.

Invitation