

E-Series

In God We Trust?



6 For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. **7** Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?" **8** Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! **9** You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! **10** Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus

put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. **—Malachi 3:6-10**

Today we talked about a difficult subject—tithing. From the start, I shared with you my discomfort in preaching on the subject, and afterwards one of our members came up to me and said, "You know, I pray for the day when you won't dread preaching on this subject. For me, it is a great privilege to be able to give my tithes and offerings." This particular person gives his tithes (ten percent) and offerings (above ten percent), and he wants other people to experience the joy and freedom that he has experienced through giving.

Still, it's a difficult subject, one that many people would rather not hear about.

During the sermon, I told you that this week I had received an e-series message from a friend of mine, James Howell (pastor of Myers Park UMC in Charlotte). Below I will share his reflections about stewardship.

eGrowthInFaith – stewardship

Stewardship is a spiritual practice? It feels more like the inevitable business side of the Church, bills to pay, budgets to meet... and yet with a personal edge: How much do they really need? Is there enough transparency for me to feel my money is put to good use? Do I support what they are doing with the money?

Jesus seems to have thought up the idea of stewardship, and he didn't manage a budget or provide payroll. When he taught, he stood outside and pointed to real vineyards his listeners could see, in which many of them worked. Every vineyard was owned by some rich person who didn't do manual labor. He hired a steward, someone to be sure the vineyard was productive. The steward didn't own the vineyard, but his task was to prosper the owner, and to be sure all the workers had enough food to eat to keep working; his delight was in the good of the owner, and for those who needed the vineyard to survive.

This is what stewardship really is. God owns the vineyard: the earth, all the stuff you come into contact with, your money, house, talents, time. You exist to prosper, not yourself, but God, and those who need what's in the vineyard God owns in order to survive.

Our society, unquestionably, lifts up [money](#) as its ultimate idol. We really do believe money is the fullness of life, that problems are solved best with money, that more money would make whatever situation better. Money is a powerful instrument, and much good can be done with it! – but money is God's most arrogant rival, and so when we part with it for God, and for those in dire need, we actually shed layers of insulation between ourselves and God. Generosity gives birth to a more spiritual heart; greed, or clinging, or the thought that I am cool or

secure or in control because of my money, actually digs out an unbridgeable canyon between ourselves and God.

So we give to the Church, not to pay bills, or because they need some money (which we do!), but because we need to grow closer to God; we recognize that the hollowness we bear in the soul is there because we have let money usurp the role God desires to fill in our lives. [Generosity](#) matters for the needy whose plight breaks God's heart, for those eager to learn about God, for the hurting and hopeful who look to the Church for solace.

Methodists have always taught "tithing," giving 10% of whatever we earn to the Church. Sounds manipulative, I know – so it's worth mentioning that [John Wesley](#), our founder, was opposed to tithing. He thought 10% was simply too little to give to the work of God – and might create the foolish illusion that 90% of my money is mine! It all belongs to God: how we spend it all, whether my spirituality lowers the temperature on my feelings about money, how we invest, or give, or even speak about money. It is a spiritual practice, and an attentiveness to its place in our heart is perhaps the key to growth in faith.

James Howell

I'm thankful for James' word and especially for the example of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. A remarkable witness in the area of stewardship, Wesley made more money each year of his life, but continued to live on the same small amount that his entire life. He gave the rest to the church and to help the poor of England. It was Wesley who famously said, "make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."

Trusting in God,
Pastor Michael

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