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Stewardship 2

Generosity of the Heart
Matthew 6:19-21 (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

PATHWAYS [1 Timothy 6:17-19]

¹⁷ *As for those who in the present age are **rich**, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.* ¹⁸ *They are to **do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,*** ¹⁹ *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.***]

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[h] consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust^[i] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

I wonder, what ‘treasures in heaven’ means to you?

One of the most memorable depictions of what Jesus is talking about was something I saw in Tulsa with my dad.

We were eating lunch, and noticed that at the funeral home across the street, Was a hearse....with a U-haul truck attached behind it.
So we started shaking our heads and saying,
‘maybe you can take it with you!’.

It reminds me of the man who wanted to be buried with his money.

So when he died, his wife honored his wishes....
she wrote him a CHECK, and put it in with his body.

What does ‘treasures in heaven’ mean to you?

What is Jesus saying to you—to us?

Jesus says “Do not store up treasures on earth”---where they can be destroyed.

Instead, store up treasures in heaven.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus was talking about generosity—from the HEART.

Which sounds pretty straightforward and simple, right?

We are asked to give, not hoard.

We are asked to be generous.

But this calling is ***far from simple, or easy!***

We are ***not always generous***, are we?

Maybe this is why Jesus spoke more about MONEY than any other topic

besides the kingdom of God!

More than faith, prayer, love!

Why?

Because Jesus was smart.

He knew that money can be like a chain around our hearts.

And he knew that money and the kingdom of God—

his two most popular topics—are actually ***intertwined!***

How is the kingdom related to money?

The first way is obvious—the kingdom involves storing up eternal treasures—things like investing in people’s lives, serving and loving one another.

But it’s also related in a simple way.

We are called to help one another, with our own financial resources, to bring the kingdom of God ‘*on earth as it is in heaven*’.

We do this with the generosity of our own hearts, lives and wallets.

Again, it sounds simple.

But it’s not easy.

WHY is it so difficult?

Maybe it’s the fact that we usually live in ***worry and fear*** about the future—worry and fear about our finances.

Anyone here ever worry about money?

Pastor Karen loaned me a great book called ***“The Soul of Money” by Lynne Twist.***

Although it is not overtly Christian, it reflects many kingdom truths.

Twist says that we are often trapped by the Myth of SCARCITY.

And she says within scarcity are three ‘*Toxic Myths*’:

The first is: “There is NOT ENOUGH, to go around”.

This is the idea that we have to ***fight*** for what is ours—
and play a game of ‘*musical chairs*’ in life,
hoping that when the music stops, *we* have enough, even if *others* do not.
It leads us to ***compete***, to put ourselves first,
to exclude others, and to hoard.

Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money*, Norton: NY 2003, 49-50.

The second toxic myth is that “MORE Is Better”.

This leads to *greed*, the *overaccumulation* of goods, and more *fear*—
This leads us to a *faster pace* in life...
because we are focused on getting the ***next thing, and the next!***
It’s like being on a hamster wheel.
Twist calls it *a ‘chase with no end, and a race without winners’*.

Isn’t that true?

But isn’t it tempting to ***define*** ourselves by our money and possessions,
and make our lives about getting MORE?
More money, bigger house, newer car, latest electronics....
Even the ***richest*** people get trapped by this idea—
wanting more, and more than they could ever use or imagine.
If more is better, there is no end in sight!
Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money*, Norton: NY 2003, 50-52.

The third toxic myth is “That’s Just the WAY IT IS”.

This is the idea of ***resignation***,
That we are stuck on the hamster wheel, in an unfair world.
So we can just be cynical, hopeless and helpless—
This belief justifies ***greed, and inaction!***
This means that the rich feel entitled, and feel no responsibility to fight inequity.
Twist, 53-54.

So what’s the answer if we ALL struggle with these myths?

Twist suggests that we have to reclaim the idea of **SUFFICIENCY**.
Not the idea that we have enough—
but rather the experience that ***there IS enough, and we ARE enough.***

This conscious decision helps us find freedom, integrity, and meaning in life.

We can let go of the chase, get off the hamster wheel, and truly live,
using our money in a way that honors our integrity.

Twist says: “*The struggle for sufficiency has nothing to do with the **AMOUNT of money** you have.*

*It’s all about the **RELATIONSHIP** you have with money”.*

Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money*, Norton: NY 2003, 74-77.

Amen to that!

Isn’t it interesting that these reflections echo Jesus?

One of Jesus’ most common refrains is “*Do Not Fear*”.

The very same thing that God, the prophets and the angels proclaim.

Jesus encourages us to not worry—and trust that God will always provide.

We too must fight the myth that there is **NOT ENOUGH**—

because God provides us enough, even enough to share.

*We also must fight the **MORE IS BETTER** myth.*

We are called to be content with what we have,

And to have the mind of Christ--

Which means we focus on others, not ourselves.

We don’t need to selfishly keep acquiring more.

*And we resist the idea that that’s **JUST THE WAY IT IS**,*

Because we trust in Jesus.

We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit

to bring hope and transformation—no matter what.

And we have been called to care for the least of these,

to use our talents for good,

to work toward justice and mercy.

As followers of Jesus, we do not accept the status quo of inequity or injustice.

In her book, Twist mentions the economic crash of 2008.

She and her husband watched their retirement savings disappear.

But, they also learned an important lesson.

They learned the power of **conversation, and hope**.

They could’ve let money worries destroy them,

but instead, they used that time as an opportunity to **count** their blessings,

and to **reconnect** with everything non-material in their lives.

[Sounds kind of like *1 Timothy 6, doesn’t it?*

To take hold of the **life that really is life?**]

Twist and her husband realized that losing all their retirement money had NO EFFECT on their love for each other.

They still had their family and kids.

They were alive.

So therefore, they could give thanks!

She mentions something interesting about a particular Chinese word that can change meaning, depending on its context.

The word is **CRISIS**,

but it can be interpreted as either **DANGER, or OPPORTUNITY**.

What if having money in our lives is similar?

What we HAVE and what we DO with it,

can either be **dangerous, or a great opportunity, right?**

Lynne Twist, *The Soul of Money*, Norton: NY 2003, 205-7.

What if this is true of our congregation as well?

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard wrote the great book '**Contagious Generosity**'.

And they write about how the CURE for scarcity is **generosity**,

And generous people, and churches have certain **qualities**.

For instance, they do not see limits,

They believe that God creates resources, where none may exist!

And generous people and churches are rooted in faith,

And open to the impossible!

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg.62

Of course, some churches teach people to give—so you can RECEIVE!

But such health and wealth theology is not Jesus' message.

Jesus gave without expecting anything in return.

So, we too are called to give, without expectation of any reward.

Will we be blessed by giving? Of course!

But it might be the blessing of joy, peace, or freedom from the grip of money.

We do not give to receive,

we give because God generously gives to us!

Generosity is also NOT about raising money for a church.

And stewardship is **NOT** about a church budget.

Not at all.

It's all about our **HEARTS**.

It's about an opportunity to be changed, transformed, and to grow in faith.

Giving to God is not about raising money, it's about raising disciples.

Changing lives is the goal—not changing a bank account.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg.41.

I've met a lot of people in ministry who are turned off by churches that constantly ask for money.

Me too! So let's avoid that!

Encouraging heartfelt generosity is different.

Willard and Sheppard mention a pastor who wisely told his congregation:

Generosity is not something we want FROM you, it's what we want FOR you.

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard, *Contagious Generosity*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012, pg.27.

So true!

Generosity changes lives, and it changes the church, for the better!

Generous churches attract people--

because generosity is ***real and surprising*** in a world full of greed and consumption and hoarding.

Jesus said where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We often think that if our heart is right, THEN we'll give.

But Jesus said the opposite.

He said, ***GIVE FIRST, and your heart will follow.***

What if we took Jesus' words to heart?

I believe we can! We can be generous people, and a generous church!

I believe that sharing our resources means our hearts will be united with Jesus, and one another---

And there is no limit to the power of the Holy Spirit, guiding us into the future.

There is enough.

More is not always better.

And we do not accept the status quo.

We've been called to work for the kingdom of God, *on earth as it is in heaven*.

So we stand for the least of these, and we help people in need.

Like all those who are losing food assistance and insurance subsidies, right now.

We will do everything we can to help those who are hungry and suffering,

And our gifts make that possible!

How will YOU take hold of the life that really is life?

How will we do more than talk about the change we want to see in the world----

How will we BE that change?

May God give us the courage to give, generously, from the heart.

And for that Good News, all God's people can say together, Amen.