

Matthew 6:19-34

**Matters of the Heart©
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Every year, when this day of turning in our pledges comes around, I approach it with some concern. The truth is no pastor really wants to talk about money. We don't want to ever come across as being coercive or manipulative. We feel like we are walking a fine line, sometimes, because we have all heard people say, "All they do in that church is ask for money." (Although I have not heard it here)

I've had a few people say to me that they think I am different – that I don't seem to have a problem talking about money. Well, that's true in a way, but it's also not completely true.

I'm not good at asking for money when it comes to trying to sell something that I hope people will want but I know they don't absolutely need. Like Mary Kay skin care and cosmetics.

For the 4th time, I am a Mary Kay consultant. I signed up to help my daughter, thinking it would give me a fun way of meeting new people and purchasing my own stuff at a good price. Kind of hobby that might be a little profitable.

But I'm not a salesperson. I rather timidly ask if anyone needs anything and if there is no response, I let it go. I make no money at it; in fact, I've *lost* money doing it. You'd think I'd learn my lesson on these things.

So, you see, I'm not that good at talking about money.

But what I *am* good at – or at least what I am passionate about, which makes it fairly easy to talk about – is being a spiritual leader for the people God has called me to serve and to help grow into strong disciples. I believe **that** is a necessity in our lives. I believe we will be happier and healthier (at least spiritually) if we grow in our discipleship.

And I have learned from studying the Bible, and maybe more importantly, from my own meager, faltering experience that practicing stewardship is one of the ways we grow. We grow in our faith; we grow in our trust in God who makes us stewards; and we grow in our ability to serve God and others.

It's important to me that you hear this statement: Stewardship is about more than money. *Stewardship is about more than money.*

What is a steward, anyway? In the bible, Jesus tells stories about land owners who put their most trustworthy people in charge of running the farm, or in charge of overseeing the estate – including investing their finances.

The steward oversees the work of those under him. And the steward always comes back to answer to the master – the one who is in charge. I guess you could call a steward an administrator or a manager.

A steward knows that everything he is in charge of belongs, not to him, but to the owner, the master. The steward has deep respect for the master and appreciates the trust shown to him. In turn, the steward trusts that the master will take good care of him and his family. He is not concerned for his welfare – where he will live, what they will eat or what they will wear. It is a two way trust. He gladly gives his time, his resources, his talents to care for what he has been put in charge of and trusts the master completely.

Stewardship is not just about money. It is about giving our time; about understanding that all we have belongs to the Creator; it is about using our talents to grow and enhance what we have been given; it is about using our resources to grow what belongs to the master; and above all, it is about trust – trusting that the master will take care of us.

And while it's true that stewardship is not just about money, it is also true that money is an important part of stewardship. One thing we see from our gospel reading today is that Jesus had no problem talking about money. He calls it our treasure.

Jesus says to store up your treasure in the places that will last – like heavenly, Godly things. He makes a point of saying that when we store up our treasure here on earth it is in danger all the time of rotting away (although I never have it long enough for it to rot); or it gets stolen by thieves and scammers.

Jesus indicates that giving is a matter of the heart. He says where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

I began to wonder about that statement. I've heard it and quoted it many times, and have always thought that if you put your treasure (your money) into something, that shows where your heart is – where your passion is. And I do believe that is true.

But what if you give to the church and your heart really isn't completely in it. It's not that you don't want to give to the church, nor is it that you don't love the church, because you do.

But you might have doubts about whether or not you can get by, if you give to the church – especially if you are trying to tithe 10%. That's a huge leap of faith to give 10% of your income first and foremost to the church.

It can be a scary thing, especially for someone doing it for the first time ever. (It can be rather scary for those of us who have done it for a while.)

So, could it work the *other way*? If you give to something *before* your heart is 100% in it, could it be that just that act of faith can pull your heart into it in a deeper and more passionate way?

I believe that is true as well.

Sometimes just doing it –

- making the commitment because I believe it's what God is leading me to do;
- being faithful in that even when I have my fears and doubts, even when I think, as I drop that check into the offering plate of all the things I could use that for –
- doing it month after month and seeing how God is in it; seeing how trustworthy God is in caring for me;
- observing the activity in the mission of the church –

Usually, it is in the act of consistently doing it that I begin to have more passion for the ministry; and I begin to want to be more involved in the place where I am investing so much.

Suddenly I realize my heart has caught up with where my treasure is!

Suddenly, I discover that I'm experiencing deep joy as I am able to give. And the fear is subsiding. I may still have those little bits of anxiety but they go away; they aren't so strong that I'm tempted to tear up the check before giving it. My worries are dissipated because time after time things work out.

I also begin to find that I'm not as interested in all the material things I once was so excited about. I find that doing without some of it actually feels good.

Jesus says not to worry about anything because the Father knows what we need and is watching over us. As we give, I think our eyes are open in a new way and we see how God is taking care of us.

You may be wondering how giving to the church could be compared with storing up treasures in heaven. Yes, the money you give pays for earthly kinds of things:

- It pays salaries
- It pays utilities
- It pays for paper and pens and computers and copy machines and crayons and books.
- It pays for advertising

Earthly kinds of things for sure. But think about how long this one particular church has existed! 154 years? That's a long time for one church to be at work telling the good news of God's love shown to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ.

That is a long time for pastors to preach God's Word; for Scripture to be read out loud; for bible studies to be taught; for children to be raised in the Christian faith; for baptisms and communion to be celebrated; for outreach ministries to be done; for shut-ins and hospital calls to be made in the name of the Good Shepherd.

If it weren't for generous givers who trusted that God would take care of them; who were stepping out in faith as stewards, this church would not be alive and active today.

When we give our treasures – and our time and use our talents for the church of Jesus Christ, we *are* investing in heavenly things.

Today, we have this opportunity – this privilege to give from our hearts – or at least to give out of our faith, out of love and gratitude for God, trusting that our hearts will follow.

Let us take a minute to silently reflect on what God has given us and to pray about what God might be asking us to do. I know some of you turned in your pledge cards already. Maybe some of you forgot your card. But for those who have them, please look them over as you are praying.

Are you giving what you believe God is leading you to give of your treasure? Have you made a decision to raise it up a step? Perhaps you feel God is leading you to tithe for the first time; or to give a percentage – whether it be 10% or a smaller or larger percentage. Maybe you just want to give a certain amount for now.

Do you want to give a little extra to help with this beautiful old building – this house of worship?

What about time? Have you prayerfully listed an amount of time you want to give? And do you have an area in the church where you feel passionate about serving?

Whatever you do, do it with love and joy, knowing it will be honored and you will be blessed, even as you are a blessing, believing that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Let us pray ...

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