

Offerings Of Gratitude

Memory Text: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Setting The Stage: Because it is the very nature of God to give (after all, He gave his only begotten Son, and is willing to give His Spirit—see Luke 11:13), God expects His children—those who claim to possess His Spirit—to be giving and generous also.

American individuals, estates, foundations and corporations contributed an estimated \$390.05 billion to U.S. charities in 2016, according to Giving USA 2017: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2016.

Not long ago Bill Gates and Warren Buffet made headlines when they asked billionaires to give away half of their wealth. Even more stunning was that many of the 1,000 responded. Forbes magazine estimated that charities would receive \$150 billion as a result, however their example was by no means new. In fact, they were simply taking up a long-held belief that giving is central to receiving. Notice what the Bible says:

Proverbs 3:9, 10: “Honor the Lord with your possessions, and the first-fruits of your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.”

Proverbs 11:25: “The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.”

Matthew 5:7: “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”

2 Corinthians 9:6: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

Sir John Templeton, the stellar investor who founded Templeton Funds, gave millions to charities. He firmly believed that his spiritual exercises, not his market insight, were responsible for his great financial success.

Like Templeton, Ben Franklin once noted that money itself provides nothing of value to human interaction: “The only constant and durable source of happiness is in acts of humanity, friendship, generosity, and benevolence.”

While as Christians we are to be sensible stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us, which involves good budgeting practices, saving, reducing personal debt, and intelligent investing; we should ever remain cheerful givers.

We should give to help those in need within our families and the greater church family; give a faithful and consistent tithe so the everlasting gospel can go to entire the world; and give systematically toward the mission of the local and world-wide church. And the giving shouldn't be limited to the treasure's we take out of our purses and wallets either. We have only really begun to give when we give financially. What about our time and talents, too? We should never succumb to "giving paralysis."

Offering – "a thing offered," as in, "I'm offering you this thing..." a gift.

Gratitude – "the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness."

Illustration: A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were coming out of church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did."

Sunday – Where Your Treasure Is

Matthew 6:19-21; Colossians 3:1, 2; Hebrews 10:34

Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The full magnitude of this statement can be seen in the first two verses, which contrast storing our treasures on earth with storing them in heaven. Three words describe earth: moths, rust, and thieves, all of which imply just how temporal and transient our earthly treasure is. *Story of suits in dorm room closet (moths!).*

On earth everything is unstable, uncertain, and insecure; it is subject to decay, destruction, stealing, and loss. Heaven is the opposite: everything is eternal, durable, secure, and imperishable. In heaven there is no loss.

How can we be free from the powerful hold earthly treasures can have on us?

Colossians 3:1, 2: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

This isn't a call to become so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good, but to make things of eternity our top priority and never let anything else remove it from

the top. Treasures have a way to tug at us and keep getting our attention. If we're absorbed with our treasures here, how will we ever make treasures in heaven?

Hebrews 10:34: "For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven."

These early believers had their property and possession confiscated from them, yet they didn't let it bother them knowing they had a place prepared for them in heaven. More than this, they "joyfully accepted" it. There was nothing they could do about it, so they rested in the knowledge of their treasurers in heaven.

Monday – Stewards Of The Grace Of God

Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Peter 4:10

Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

Illustration: Falcon Heavy is the most powerful operational rocket in the world. It has the ability to lift into orbit nearly 64 metric tons (141,000 lb)—a mass greater than a 737 jetliner loaded with passengers, crew, luggage and fuel.

Its first stage is composed of three Falcon 9 nine-engine cores whose 27 Merlin engines together generate more than 5 million pounds of thrust at liftoff, equal to approximately eighteen 747 aircraft. Only the Saturn V moon rocket, last flown in 1973, delivered more payload to orbit. Falcon Heavy was designed from the outset to carry humans into space and restores the possibility of flying missions with crew to the Moon or Mars.

A spacecraft leaving the surface of Earth needs to be going about 7 miles per second, or over 25,000 miles per hour, to enter orbit (33 times the speed of sound). Achieving escape velocity is one of the biggest challenges facing space travel. Achieving escape velocity is the biggest challenge for sinners, for the selfish. But there is power available to rise above selfishness.

Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

1 Corinthians 1:18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

How is grace related to stewardship?

1 Peter 4:10: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

God has given us gifts; therefore, we need to give back from what we have been given. What we have received, by grace, is not just for pleasing and benefiting

ourselves, but for the furtherance of the gospel. Freely we have been given (which is what grace is all about); freely, then, we need to give every way we can.

Tuesday – Our Best Offering

Luke 7:37-47, Leviticus 22:19-24; Romans 12:1

Luke 7:37-47. What does this story teach us about the proper motivation for offerings to God?

This story captures what truly should be our motivation in the giving of our offerings: gratitude. After all, what other response should we have to the priceless gift of the grace of God? His generosity also prompts us to give, and when coupled with our gratitude, both make up the ingredients of meaningful offerings, including our time, talents, treasures, and bodies.

What type of offerings should we bring to the Lord? See **Leviticus 22:19-24**.

Romans 12:1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

Leftovers are such humble things, We would not serve to a guest,
And yet we serve them to our Lord Who deserve the very best.
We give to Him leftover time, Stray minutes here and there.
Leftover cash we give to Him, Such few coins as we can spare.
We give our youth unto the world, To hatred, lust and strife;
Then in declining years we give, To him the remnant of our life.

God deserves our best doesn't He? Once we receive our paycheck, we should be quick to give a tithe and offering right off the top. While we have strength, we should give God our all. Otherwise, what would we be saying about how important God is in our lives if we gave Him merely leftovers?

Wednesday – The Motives Of The Heart

2 Corinthians 8:8-15

In an earlier lesson, it was noted the story of the widow's generous offering. Although minuscule in comparison to other offerings, it was generous because it showed the true nature of her character and heart, prompting Jesus to say, “This poor widow has put in more than all.” (Luke 21:3)

God alone knows our true motives (Prov. 16:2). It is possible to have the right actions with the wrong motives. To give out of abundance doesn't require much faith, but to give sacrificially for the good of others can indeed say something very powerful about our hearts. *“If you give what you do not need, it isn't giving.”* – Mother Theresa

How much should we give then? *“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.”* – C. S. Lewis

2 Corinthians 8:8–15. What is Paul talking about here in regard to giving and the motives for giving? What principles can we take from these verses regarding stewardship?

The fight between selfishness and giving is fought more frequently than any other spiritual fight. Selfishness will chill a heart that was once on fire for God. The problem comes when we let selfishness into our Christian experience. That is, we find ways to justify our selfishness and do it in the name of Christ.

The bottom line comes down to one word: love. And love cannot be manifested without self-denial, a willingness to give of oneself, even sacrificially, for the good of others.

Unless God’s love is reflected in our lives, our giving will not reflect God’s love. God’s love directed toward us inspires us to love in return, and it is truly the supreme motive for giving.

Thursday – The Experience Of Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6, 7

If Christ came to reveal to us the character of God, one thing should be clear by now: God loves us, and He wants only the best for us. He asks us to do only what would be for our own benefit, never to our detriment. This would include, too, His call for us to be generous and cheerful givers of what we have been given. The freewill and generous offerings we give are as much a benefit to ourselves, the giver, as they can be to those who receive them. Only those who give this way can know for themselves just how much more blessed it is to give than to receive.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

Illustration: Bob Haverstick of Indianapolis, Indiana had just been laid off from the computer software job he’d been working at for 14 years when the company had to close its doors. At the age of 51 he wasn’t optimistic that he’d get a job that would help him keep his standard of living.

Cathy, his wife, encouraged Bob to start his own business, a dream he had in the past, which had been dashed by the challenges of the real world. Praying about what to do he thought how great it would be to grant peoples wishes and make dreams comes true.

This passing thought haunted Bob. He decided to share it with his wife, and to his surprise she liked it and suggested that perhaps it could become a job despite the apparent difficulties. So they prayed about it and studied the Bible about it. While studying, Bob came across the statement in Proverbs that said: "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to act." (Prov. 3:27) This was the beginning of Bob's venture to make other peoples dreams come true.

He started a public charity named "Never Too Late," and in its years of operation it has helped many individuals do the things they only dreamed of doing or wanted to do again. For example, there was the eighty something lady who lived in a nursing home and hadn't had a new dress in ages. Bob took her out and got her five new dresses so she could wear them to church. There was also the retired farmer who hadn't sat on a tractor for years. He got to plow a field one last time. A 92 year-old woman got her dream to race around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway at more than 120 miles/hour. Then there was the octogenarian couple that got to go skydiving for their sixtieth wedding anniversary.

Bob said, "What I do has become much more than a job. It's my calling, that place where I feel I'm meant to serve God. I fulfill peoples dreams..."

God's dream for you and me is that our hearts would be so overflowing with His love that it would spill over in generous and sacrificial offerings for the benefit of God's work.

We should give to help those in need within our families and the greater church family; give a faithful and consistent tithe so the everlasting gospel can go to entire the world; and give systematically toward the mission of the local and world-wide church. And the giving shouldn't be limited to the treasure's we take out of our purses and wallets either. We have only really begun to give when we give financially. What about our time and talents, too? We should never succumb to "giving paralysis."