

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Teaching Ministries of Dartmouth Bible Church

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Series: Great Words About Stewardship
Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 1 May 24, 1992

All That I Own, Belongs to Him (What "Stewardship" Means)

Introduction There are a number of single issues which press on people's hearts.

- * Health is a big one.
- * Sexuality is another one.
- * Family relationships weigh heavy on people's minds.

For Christians, there is a whole *additional* set of issues that we ponder and give attention to: things like,

- * How can I grow closer to God?
- * Will my wife/husband/child/parent/best friend be saved?
- * What is God's will for my life, specifically?

But I think one of the great issues which everybody must face is the matter of STEWARDSHIP. Today we are beginning a series of messages on the matter of stewardship. My desire is to make this as practical and plain as I can, because it is an important subject for all believers to have a good handle on. This has to do with *other* pressing questions too--it dovetails with some other things we are striving to understand: like

- * What is God's will for my life, specifically?
- * How can I grow closer to God?
- * Even though I'm saved, why is real joy such a rare thing?

All believers need to *think biblically* about this. It is a basic part of Christian discipleship, and it is a shame how many believers there are running around who have never been walked through a systematic study of stewardship, and are worse off for it!

One Sunday a family sat down at the dinner table following church. The sixteen-year old son said, "The sermon was boring today." His sister chimed in, "Yeah, could you believe how the pastor stumbled over the Scripture reading?" Mom said, too, "I've got to admit it wasn't a very inspiring day. The choir was terrible." But then Dad--showing his leadership--said, "Hush, you guys. Quit complaining. What did you expect for a quarter?"

Now I know this is a touchy thing for a preacher to talk about in these days. Preachers and religious ministries have come to be thought of as being money-grubbing, greedy businessmen. But, you know in reality, this pulpit has never talked much AT ALL about this subject. But the timing is right, I think, to treat stewardship. For those of you who

might respond with--"well, I want to hear about Jesus," let me challenge you that if you want to hear about Jesus, you will want to hear about *anything* that gets a lot of coverage in His Word, won't you? The whole idea of "Hey Jesus, don't talk--just let me look at you" is absurd, but that's how we sometimes pick and choose which subjects we like to hear. But Spirit filled Christians are going to be willing to look at any subject that the Word of God deals with. Remember,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16,17).

THE STARTING PLACE FOR CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP: The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Now, the "parable of the talents" that we have read today was given by Jesus to draw a contrast between those people who MAKE USE OF GOD'S GIFTS and THOSE WHO DO NOT. If we were to water down the story, we might prefer to eliminate verses 24-30. It would be pleasant to just think about those two slaves to whom the master responded, *Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master (vss. 21, 23).*

But when Jesus spoke, folks, there was some bite in His words. Jesus knew the whole story about life. He knew what things were really important and what things were not. He knew all too well the tendency that folks have to lose perspective on what is and what isn't important. And although folks may not like to think about the warning passages in Scripture, they are still *THERE*. So, verse 28 has some teeth in it, I'm afraid. God will hold us accountable for the things He has said in His Word, make no mistake about it.

But I do not think our motivation is really supposed to be *fear*. I am driven more and more to seek the Lord because He loves me. And the evidence of His love for me is the many things He has given me. He has given me an abundance of good things! And my MANAGEMENT of those gifts is what we call "stewardship."

Stewardship: my management of God's gifts to me

This is what Jesus' parable of the talents is about. The slaves are GIVEN a certain number of talents. Each has a different number given to him, doesn't he? What was Jesus showing in saying that each slave was given by the master a DIFFERENT number of talents? Well, the same thing we see when we look at each other. We have about 140 adults in this church right now. Some have a great deal in terms of ability, skills, knowledge. Some have only a few skills or abilities. Some have more possessions than others. Some have a smaller amount of possessions. Some of you FIT INTO the category of the first slave; others into the category of the second slave and some into the category of the third--in terms of the amount that God has invested in you (I hope none of you end up LIKE the third slave, though!)

Each slave had the OPPORTUNITY to manage the gifts given to him by the master, realizing that those "talents" were not really his to begin with, right? We, however, are not used to thinking of everything I have as really belonging to someone else even if the "Someone Else" is the Lord. We like to think that what I have is MINE--we entertain attitudes sometimes like this: "No one gave me what I have; I got it on my own. I

scratched and labored and worked hard to get where I am and no mealy-mouthed preacher or anyone else, for that matter is going to suggest that what I have is someone else's." Now I know that's pretty stern, but folks, STERN is how people are when we're talking about things as precious as time and skills and money.

But when a person becomes a Christian, he joins a "club" of people for whom it is now possible to ESCAPE those old, selfish thought-patterns. A non-Christian has NO CHOICE but to remain enslaved to a self-centered perspective on his possessions. A non-Christian is not generally a thankful person, looking at his possessions and innate abilities as GIFTS from God. But when a person really comes to Christ, he knows that EVERYTHING I have ultimately belongs to the Lord.

I Cor. 6:19, 20

When you ask me to gauge the degree of spirituality of a church, I'm not nearly so impressed by how well they "do" worship, by how snazzy their building is, by how highly thought of their preacher is, AS I AM by the true degree to which they, as a body of individual people RECOGNIZE the Lordship of Christ. If Jesus is Lord, as we say all the time and sing all the time, then that means that HE is the "master," the Lord. And therefore I am not the "lord." And therefore what I HAVE, is really His.

Now I was thinking over my own life; taking an "inventory", if you will. (I know we only do this at Thanksgiving, right?) Here's some of the things God has given to me:

1. My position in Christ--my salvation. There are a great many precious gifts I have because of that.
2. AT LEAST ONE "spiritual gift."
3. A few talents (and a few tools, like a computer, a guitar, a library, etc.)
4. 168 hours per week.
5. One wife and two little girls.
6. One house and an 80' x 40' lot.
7. Two cars.
8. An annual income.
9. When I die I will leave behind some kind of "estate" (a very loose term...)

Now, in this definition of "stewardship" which I have given you, there are TWO KEY WORDS:

1. **Gifts** - which are the kinds of things I inventoried for myself above. The things which I have and enjoy that God has given to me.
2. **Management** - now here is a place where we must be careful. In performing my responsibility as a STEWARD of the things God has given me, it is not just "USE" that I mean by "management." The third slave (in Jesus' parable) did *something* with the one talent he was given.

A great many people out there would say, "Yes, I believe God wants us to 'use' His gifts." Only the most obstinate or arrogant pagan would *completely* reject the principle of stewardship, right? And so lots of people will SAY they are "using" the talents, possessions or income they have by making "wise investment" of them. I'm sure they are sincere enough...

When I was an engineer I remember a conversation with a fellow engineer who knew I was a Christian. He was good at doing briefings for the Navy and

in the copier room one day he made the comment,
 "Well, we're all God's children and we all need
 to use well the gifts He's given us."

But as I understand stewardship, it is the use of our gifts
 FOR HIM, FOR HIS KINGDOM, FOR THE GOSPEL that is foremost
 on His heart. And so, how we are using our time, our spiritual
 gifts, our relationships, our money FOR THE KINGDOM SPECIFI-
 CALLY is what I mean by "management."

When I was in college I had a friend named ~~Ken~~ ^{Walt McDaniel} ~~Kerr~~ ^{Walt}. ~~Kerr~~
 managed a little apartment complex while he was going
 through school. He didn't own the apartment complex,
 he and his wife were just the ON-SITE managers. And
 in exchange for their services of keeping up the appea-
 rance, doing repairs, managing the rentals and so forth,
^{Walt} they were allowed to live there themselves, rent-free.
~~Ken~~ and his wife didn't profit directly from how well
 they managed the apartment complex. They worked for
 their boss...

God gives us many gifts to manage. It is our job to take stock
 of the inventory of what God has given to us. Do that...
 What has God given you? How have you used it for Him up to
 this point? How are you using it right now? How will you use
 for His Kingdom and for the Gospel?

Stewardship is "my management of God's gifts to me." Now, I need to
 know what God expects, if I am going to be a good steward of His gifts,
 right? And that is the subject of this series from here on out. I think
 God has made it clear what He expects. I am not going to tell you
 specifically WHAT to do with what you have been given. That's a task for
 you to prayerfully perform yourself. What I do want to cover, and cover
 thoroughly, is the HOW...

The first step is to really realize that everything you have is token
 of God's love for you.

You don't have a good wife (men) because you, by chance, ran into a
 good candidate and made your own intelligent decision. You have
 one because God loves you personally.

You don't have a job with a pretty good income because you're such a
 brilliant and valuable worker. You have one because God has
 patiently provided and blessed you and because His plan for
 you is to work, to produce and to enjoy fruitfulness.

You don't have natural ability to work well with kids because of
 the gene-pool from which you were "spawned." That is a gift
 (or at least a talent) that God has INVESTED in you because
 He loves you.

If all this seems terribly "God-centered", you're right. I'm not too
 wowed by what people call the "natural goodness of man." In fact I'm not
 at all sure such a thing exists. But I AM SURE of the goodness of God. He
 has given me a great deal. How about you? What are you doing with all
 the many and wonderful things He has given to you?

Now, yes, the GOAL of this message series is to help you GROW in your stewardship. I have no interest in just "teaching" this, and it bearing no real fruit in this assembly. So as I present each of these messages, please pray for the Lord to show you *personal* applications. Pray for your own willingness to obey Him as HE teaches you. My desire is to see us as a church fully committed to managing well the gifts He has given us.

The first step is to take a serious and careful inventory.

The second step is what we will look at in two weeks (Lord willing), to dedicate my whole life over to Him, including all of God's gifts to me.

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52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Series: Great Words About Stewardship
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-6

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 2 June 7th, 1992

Self-Giving ("Dedication" - Macedonian Style)

Introduction I have noticed something about what happens when a person becomes a Christian. (Of course, a great many things happen to a person, when he or she really becomes born-again--that is a subject of on-going interest to me...) But one thing I have observed, is that when a person really meets the Lord, they get this strange desire to really serve Jesus, to GIVE BACK to Him. It's this *compulsion* for love and gratitude TOWARDS God, responding to the love and sacrifice he's received FROM God. It isn't a grudging feeling--he knows Jesus gave up a great deal for "me, personally."

If you can imagine a sailor on a ship, and being washed overboard into the sea... And then another person grabs a life preserver with a rope on it and jumps into the sea and rescues that poor person--you would not see the rescued person, back on deck now, begrudgingly reach around, pull out his wallet and hand this soaked \$1 bill to his rescuer and say, "Oh all right, here ya go, I guess you've earned it." No. No such thing happens. What does happen? He grabs the rescuer, or falls at his feet and says, "Thank you, oh, thank you. If ever I can do *anything, anything at all* for you, just say the word." (In fact, in certain cultures of the world, a life saved is a life owed, and the rescued person places himself into actual slavery to the rescuer...) That, in fact, is more the picture of the born-again person. And he looks at his rescued life, and says, "Lord Jesus, all that I am and all that I have is yours."

Now I grew up in an upper-middle class neighborhood in the suburbs of Washington D.C.; a place you would not think there would be much street violence or danger for kids. But as I look back, it amazes me how many beatings and petty robberies there were (for an area like that). And like all my buddies, I was constantly outside, around the neighborhood. One Winter night when I was in the ninth grade, me and another buddy were going down with our sleds to Farmer's Hill. It was dark--Farmer's Hill was the "coolest" place you can imagine to sled at night!--and Glenn and I were approached by about five tough guys (or older, maybe)--the term in our neighborhood was "hoods." As we were passing, they grabbed us, pulled knives on us and demanded anything at all of value we might have. We were scared. But just then--at the right time, you might say--three other dudes came walking up--big football players from my street, whom I knew well. And, they said, "Hi, Neil. What's going on?" Well, they rescued us, and imagine my emotional state right then! I guarantee you, there was no

feeling of GRUDGING ACKNOWLEDGMENT THROUGH GRITTED TEETH. At that moment, if those three rescuers had asked me to steal my Dad's car for them, I probably would have!

And this, dear ones, is the GUT-FEEL underneath what "stewardship" is all about. "Stewardship" is the first great word we have looked at: **MY MANAGEMENT OF GOD'S GIFTS TO ME.** Last time we briefly considered the parable Jesus told about the "talents", distributed by a master to three of his slaves. And then we looked at 2 Cor. 6:19,20 where we are reminded that the real Christian recognizes that he is not really his own master but that he has been "*bought with a price.*" The apostle John gives us a verse too, that applies:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:18,19).

It's a *management* deal that we're into in the Christian life. I don't really--I mean *really*--own anything. All that I have is ON LOAN to me. Or better: God has put me in charge of certain things for a period of time, and I will definitely GIVE ACCOUNT of how I have managed those things, whether we're talking about time, skills, spiritual gifts, and, yes, money too. I am actually a STEWARD. This is a fundamental assumption that a Christian operates with--THIS ISN'T MINE. It all belongs to the Lord Jesus.

Today we want to look at a SECOND word that brings more Scripture to bear on "stewardship."

The Inter-Church Sharing Of 2 Cor. 8 We return to 2 Corinthians, and when Paul wrote this, he was in Macedonia. Just to show you this on a map, can you see that ancient Macedonia is to the north of Greece? Today, Macedonia is detaching itself from Yugoslavia, and of some interest again.

By the way, I know two Macedonians. Peter Vano is a fellow who is part of the Hixville family and John Hionides is a fellow pastor from Needham. From a spiritual standpoint at least, modern-day Macedonians have a proud heritage!

This is where Paul was as he wrote this letter during the winter of A.D. 57 to the church down in Corinth. He had been re-visiting the new churches and fellowships throughout Macedonia--we don't know how far north he made it--and was starting back to Jerusalem. The Corinthian church was of special concern to Paul. They were one of the larger assemblies, and although none of the early churches was what you would consider *affluent*, the Corinthian Christian assembly was certainly among the better off.

The Macedonian assemblies on the other hand, were among the poorest, (although not THE poorest.) That distinction was reserved for the original Christian assemblies over in Judea--back in Israel. And in chapter 8 Paul relays his concern about these Judean saints and their great poverty. As Paul writes the Corinthian church ABOUT the Macedonian church, in their support of the Judean church, this is the setting of 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, which is the central N.T. passage dealing with the matter of giving.

Now, I wanted you to have this little bit of background, but, you know, it is only one detail in this great two chapters that concerns us this morning. In 2 Cor. 8:1 we read,

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia...

Now in verse 2 Paul describes what that GRACE-OF-GOD was...

THAT in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

"Hey, Corinthians, check this out: your Macedonian brethren in Christ have really been experiencing a special manifestation of God's favor and love. They are dirt-poor. They have been agonizing under severe persecution, too. But despite all that, they took up a collection for the Jewish saints who have *really* been struggling--and have sensed God's grace among themselves because of it."

It's like this: *YOU'RE* suffering. *YOU'RE* struggling with some real hard circumstance, not of your own doing...

Our problem is we suffer so much from hard circumstances that *ARE* of our doing that we don't even get much of a chance to "participate in Christ's sufferings..."

But let's say you *ARE* cooking under some hardship--a real hardship, and then in the midst of it, you become aware of a hardship your brother or sister in Christ is suffering--maybe you hear about it at church; maybe you hear about it from them personally. How do you respond? Do you turn a deaf ear to it and say, "Hey, I've got enough problems of my own..." Or do you find the where-with-all to REACH OUT and help that person yourself, from a position of pain yourself. If you achieve the second, then I think, God really blesses that immensely. *THAT* is called "grace giving." Out of your sensing God's grace to YOU, you share with others, *despite being in personal pain*. Now, admittedly, this isn't easy. That's why it was so extraordinary to Paul. He saw it happen among the Macedonian believers, as they were moved by news of Jewish believers struggles in Judea. So moved were they, that they dug down deep--real deep, despite their own poverty. If you don't mind my saying so, this "impressed the heck out of Paul." He says, "Yeah--now, that's real Christianity."

And that is GRACE-GIVING, dear ones. GRACE-GIVING is giving of myself out of a keen awareness and sensitivity to what I have been given by God, myself. The keener my awareness of what God has given me, the more ready and eager I am to give to others. Its that simple. Why were they able to give like this? Because of Paul's analysis of them, that we read in vs.5.

and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God.

That is the second word: GAVE THEMSELVES. Actually that's two words, so let's reduce it down to one word: DEDICATION. The Macedonian believers sensed God's grace and blessings in their own lives--and so, wanted to be channels of it to others--because they were so "sold out" to DO GOD'S WILL. God's grace is such a wonderful thing, when you've really experienced it, you can't keep it to yourself! Those Macedonian believers wanted to please God and fulfill His will more than they wanted anything else.

We hear non-Christians say, "How come you Christians keep wanting to cram your religion and your moral standards down our throats?" Well the reason is that God's grace tastes pretty wonderful!

Now, Paul probably figured that the Macedonian believers were *themselves* suitable candidates for help from "the Deacons' Fund," and therefore maybe he hesitated to approach THEM about support for the "Jerusalem Project". But, like the poor widow that Jesus commended (Mark 12:41-44), they were undeterred by their own poverty and gave selflessly, trusting GOD to meet their needs (just as we read recently in Phil.4:19, right?)

Now is this SELF-DEDICATION a one-time act, or a process that repeats itself over and over again? I think it is both. I think there may very well be a single MOMENT when you decide--from here on out, I'm yours, Lord. It can be a very strategic moment in some Christians' lives when they make that decision for the first time. But it is a PROCESS too. I need to give myself to the Lord often. I need to *re-calibrate* my thinking regularly and BE REMINDED that *Jesus has purchased me*. Some of the things that remind me of Jesus' ownership of me are the tapes, Christian radio programs, conferences, Christian music, I expose myself to.

This is what makes a church "on fire." It is when the people are so convinced that serving Jesus is worth anything! When a spirit of dedication sweeps through a church, it reflects in the MANPOWER availability. It reflects in the BUDGET. It reflects in OUTREACH. When you "turn yourself over" to Christ then you will not allow your own circumstances to hold you back. You will be looking for ways to minister. for ways to be part, for ways to help spread the good news about Jesus.

When I first became a Christian, one of the first things I heard someone say that really stuck with me: Christianity is not a religion. It's a relationship. That's it!

I have been given to tremendously by Jesus Christ. He sought me out, to establish a personal relationship with me, and it was and IS only through His love and grace that I call myself a Christian at all! I want to be like these ancient Macedonians. I want to be looking for ways to participate in the spread of the Gospel. Lord, may I never RECOVER from what you have done for me!

Conclusion Now folks, let me end with a challenge. Just how much has God given you? How keenly do you sense God's love and sacrifice and provision for you, personally. Vaguely? Occasionally? Some days a fair amount, other days "I don't think about it much at all...?" To be "on-fire" for Christ, means to be fully dedicating myself to him each day. Not just on the Lord's Day. Not just at extraordinary times just after you've been rescued or found a job or escaped a car accident or were healed of a sickness. Thanksgiving is surely appropriate at those times, but the God we worship, is worthy of being adored ALL TIMES and He is worthy of OWNING my whole life! And it IS POSSIBLE to get in the habit of dedicating yourself to Him, to His use, every day. You will never reach perfection until you are actually with Him. But you can learn the habit of self-dedication each day. You can say each morning, "My Lord, do with me what pleases you today. Do with my time, my skills, my spiritual gifts, money what is YOUR will. And I will keep my eyes open--I will be attentive to "signals" from you, my Lord, as to what your will for me today is.

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Series: Great Words About Stewardship
Scripture: Deut.14:22-29; 2 Cor. 9:6-9, 12

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 3 June 14, 1992

The Third Great Word: Tithing (A Bit of Schizophrenia in Evangelical Churches)

Introduction We are doing a study of biblical stewardship these days in our time in the Word, and the first word was "stewardship" itself. The second word was "dedication," which came from 2 Cor.8:5 where Paul described the Macedonian believers as having *first given themselves to the Lord* before they asked to participate in that relief project of the saints down in Jerusalem.

Last week we ended our time in the Word, with an invitation--an opportunity for anyone who wanted to, to stand and in the presence of the brethren, say this to the Lord: "Lord, I desire your will more than anything else. I give, I dedicate myself to you. All that I am is yours; all that I have is yours." Now, I have no idea who stood. That is not important, although I will gladly pray with you again today if you want to speak with me after the service or come by any time during the week. But I know that those who might have prayed that prayer last week, in earnest sincerity--those are the people who are really READY to hear the rest of this series of messages. If you are still holding yourself back from the Lord in some way, then He may still use this series of messages in your life in some way, but you will miss the full impact of what the Lord would like to do in you and in this church. Let's pray together for a moment...

I do not remember ever once hearing the word "tithing" until after I found Christ at 19 years old. "Tithing" and the word, "tithe" were things I had no idea at all what they meant. But as I began to attend a local church in my college town after I was saved, I would hear these words. It wasn't long before it became evident that "tithing" was something these people did with their money. And then, I realized that the word "tithe" seemed to mean 10% of their income. The church I got involved with did not push this thing--in fact, they were critical of other churches who DID push it. But it was understood that a spiritual person, a responsible Christian, would take the first 10% of every paycheck and give it to "the Lord's work".

You know, I feel for new Christians and non-Christians that we're trying to reach! If they come to the church to seek the Lord, they have to learn all this new vocabulary to get along in the modern church. Phrases like "Scripture", "the Lord's work," "tithing", "spiritual blessings," and so forth must really confuse newcomers. I don't apologize that Christianity has its own terminology. But I feel for that newcomer who is faced with learning how to talk all over again just to get along in the modern church. Maybe the gift of

tongues, as they had it on the day of Pentecost, would be a good idea today so that the seekers can hear about Christianity in their own language!

So, as I first saw "tithing" in action, the people in the church would put their checks or cash into the offering plate as it was passed each week during the service and that was their giving for that week. It seemed OK to me, and so I started doing it once in a while too. (You've got to remember, I was in college at the time and the money in my pocket was really my folks). That is a simple thing, isn't it--not hard to understand. The problem with that is that it doesn't match up to what "tithing" meant in either the OT OR in the NT. But "tithing" is the most common teaching about giving among evangelical churches today. We are essentially "*schizophrenic*" on "tithing." On the one hand we say (and I am going to say today) that "tithing", per se, is not what the New Testament teaches for Christians. On the other hand, we depend on most of the believers in the local church to give at least 10%. If they do not, we cannot keep the ministry operating.

Today, I want to share with you briefly what "tithing" DID mean in Israel before Jesus arrived on the scene. Then I want to introduce you to how giving to the Lord's work *changed* after Jesus' resurrection.

You know, it occurs to me this series really needs to be taken as a whole. To really understand "biblical stewardship" you can't pick it up by getting two or three out of the eight (or so) "great words."

- * We spent two "words" describing the attitude and heart-condition that lies behind what the Bible teaches on "stewardship".
- * We are spending one or two "words" on some specifics about giving in the OT.
- * And we will spend about four "words" dealing with giving in the NT, which we call grace-giving. (Oops! I'm sorry, there's more fancy vocabulary!) So I hope you will be with us for all of these if you can.

You see, this is part of what it means to be in a "Bible Church" (I know, there's *another* weird term that people don't know what it means). We are so convinced that what's in Scripture is important for us today. And when we do a good job of interpreting Scripture, we get real good understanding about exactly how God desires us to live for Him. Scripture tells us HOW to come to know Him in the first place. You don't get that on *Murphy Brown* or in the *Standard-Times* or in *Time* magazine. You find out how to begin a personal relationship with God in the first place in the Bible. And once a person HAS that wonderful relationship with the living God, then we find in the Bible how to live in ways that really please and delight the Lord, and at the same time, to be happy--I mean *really* happy ourselves. Basically, that's why we're a "Bible church." It's not that we're the only church around that USES the Bible, but that we have such a high view OF the Bible, that we're going to go there first when we have a question about life. Well, enough on this "commercial break..."

The Old Testament "Tithe"

Now we're not going to completely delete this word from our theology. The practices and laws we read about in the OT were not ABOLISHED or destroyed by Jesus, they were *fulfilled* in Him.

When something is *fulfilled* it is ENHANCED, not ignored. Because Jesus purchased us with His own life on the cross, did not mean that there was no longer any debt owed by people. The OT system of sacrifices for sin was *fulfilled* by Jesus but He didn't come along and just pronounce, "No longer any need for sin to be atoned for." He atoned for it Himself, that's all. He didn't ELIMINATE the OT Law on sacrifices for sin, He just fulfilled it Himself. Now, "tithing" is the same thing. It isn't eliminated, strictly speaking by the NT. Nowhere in the N.T. does it say, "OK, you guys, stop tithing now." But it's just ENHANCED by something greater.

This, by the way, is the basic theological error (in my view) of Catholic theology. The Catholic church is still, essentially, practicing the Old Testament, with some New Testament elements and some pagan elements too, sprinkled in. But their system is still basically an OT system.

So, here are FIVE FACTS about the word "tithe" and the O.T. practice of "tithing."

1. The word "tithe" simply means a tenth, and usually the FIRST tenth of the fruit of your work.
2. It was REQUIRED giving, not voluntary.
3. It was used for national events, as in a festival celebrated at the holy place (see Deut. 14:22 ff).

It would be like if we sent each man in the church a bill for 10% of this week's check, to be used for the lobster/clambake we're going to have next week!

4. It amounted to a TAX, and the state depended on it for the state budget.
5. It was not necessarily weekly, but at different frequencies throughout Israel's history.

Now if all this feels a little disappointing to you--"Gee, that sure sounds cut and dry and not much fun," I regret the evaporation of a fantasy! But this is basically what "tithing" means, from an O.T. standpoint. And you cannot find the practice of "tithing" dealt with in the N.T. at all, except where Jesus uses tithing as an illustration of self-righteousness (the Pharisees' boasts).

So what does God expect from US?

We do not live in Israel.

We do not gear our church life by the Law of Moses.

We do not tax our church people to fund a budget. We have not emphasized tithing at all in this church.

Well, what God expects every Christian to practice--the rich, the not so rich, the mature believers and the new believers, the church members and the non-Church members, the teens and the elderly... is what we call grace-giving as we read about in 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. I like to describe N.T. "grace-giving" three ways: Cheerful, Sacrificial, Systematic, and we will look at each one of these "great words about stewardship" in the weeks to come, Lord willing...

Giving to the Lord's work is giving to God, dear ones. It IS giving to the Dartmouth Bible Church Corporation. Our nation's laws DO allow you to deduct any sanctioned giving to this church off the earned income line on your annual 1040 form. But ultimately giving which pleases God, anyway, is an act of WORSHIP from you to your savior. It is giving graciously because you have been given the grace of God--first in Christ, your Savior, and then in many other ways too!

Jesus expects MORE from us as New Testament believers, as His disciples. For us--of all people,

people who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,
brought NEAR to the throne of grace,
bought with a price,
invested with the precious Holy Spirit,

He DOES expect us to love Him, to do AT LEAST what was prescribed by law in the Old Testament. This is what marks us, dear ones. We choose to live differently than the world, maybe even differently than the way we were brought up, because we are not ONLY, not JUST citizens of this world. We live--we CHOOSE to live--by a different ethic, a different set of priorities, a different set of passions. We serve a Risen Savior, He's in the world today! And my "stewardship"--whether it be how I manage my time, my money, my talents...REFLECTS my King! It reflects my love for Him.

May we avoid--like the plague, dear ones--the ancient error and coldness of the Ephesians (Rev.2:4). We cannot out-give God, but why not look for ways to fervently show our love and gratitude FOR Him? We have been rescued, it is NOT just our imagination and it is not just myth! Tithing is the ancient SHADOW of what would come in Christ--a people in LOVE with Him!

May we be like the ancient Macedonians; may God do this among you and me. May it show up in our giving, because we give out of the grace He has given us, and that we WILL YET receive from His loving hand.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Teaching Ministries of Dartmouth Bible Church

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Series: Great Words About Stewardship
Scripture: Psalm 50: 7-15; Matt. 5:23,24; Rom.12:1,2

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 4 June 28, 1992

The Fourth Great Word: Offering

Introduction The very idea that man, as a finite and physical creature, could give a gift to God that would 1) be acceptable and 2) even be pleasant to God is mind-blowing... God is an infinite being; He has no physical body or limits at all--He is present everywhere in the universe at the same time. And He is so perfect and excellent and HOLY, that only by approaching Him clothed in the righteousness of His own Son--and we do this by faith--can a man even *begin* to personally relate to Him. He is, wholly **transcendent** from us. He is not like us--we lose ourselves in wonder when we really begin to ponder Him and the excellencies of seeing Him with the eyes of faith.

Sometimes we Christians work so hard at making God approachable and "relatable" that we forget these things. We so much want Him to be a "regular guy" that we *overbalance* our God-concept with "good ol' boy" features and forget that He is high and lifted up. He is not like us, as He told the Israelites when they too would forget this. *So, how is it that a man or a woman can even think it possible to give something BACK to God?*

But dear ones, this is the wonder of worship! Through the relationship we enjoy with God by faith, we not only CAN offer Him gifts of love, but they are actually a delight to Him. This is one of the incredible things about the new life. A person is not only **acceptable** in the court of the King of the universe, coming as an adopted child, it is like a father receiving his adoring child on his lap. He loves nothing better than to have us love Him and adore Him and tell Him He is wonderful.

Last Sunday was Father's Day and my little girls made me home-made Father's Day cards and presents, as I'm sure many of you other Dads enjoyed. There are few joys as sweet as that moment when my little girls curl up on my lap and hug me and bring out some special token of their love to me. My friends, THAT is the kind of relationship we offer to our Heavenly Father as Christians. And any gifts we bring to Him

are not only acceptable but a pure delight to Him. Isn't Jesus wonderful? Doesn't He make wonderful things possible? And, as incredible as it may *seem* that a finite and sinful person can actually give a gift to the God of the universe, it is a real fact.

Why God Deserves Gifts It may seem unnecessary for us to delve into the question, "Does God deserve gifts?" but let me just remind you that He does! He is worthy of any and every gift you may wish to give Him. That is because, as we said in the second message in this series, He is worthy of my whole life. Since He is my Creator, since He is the Lord, and since He sent His Son to pay for my sins, He is worthy--by definition--of everything I am and have. No person or creature can ever say, "Well, today, God didn't come up to par, so today I'll hold back." Of course, this is ultimately what Satan said. For some inexplicable reason in the distant past, Satan decided God had *ceased* to be worthy of his worship and adoration.

But God IS worthy. And He should be honored on the altar of our lives with the "good stuff, right off the top."

Do you know what the best bite of cake is? It isn't the last--it's the first!

Consider with me something the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in the city of Rome: *I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies, a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (12:1).* This is really a fabulous verse, folks, and I think, a deep one. Some of you may remember Guy Lumpkin who did a six-month pastoral internship with is here at DBC about 5 years ago. He did his whole Master's thesis on this one verse. It is a deep one, a wonderful one! Now, when Paul said bodies, he meant bodies. If the Lord has your body, He's pretty much got what's important, don't you think? The Bible teaches us that our **bodies** are the Temple of the Holy Spirit--this is where God dwells now. He doesn't inhabit a Temple-building in Jerusalem or anywhere else, now. He inhabits the actual bodies of believers, now. Paul was urging--we might say *pleading with*--the Roman believers to consecrate, to dedicate their very bodies over to the Lord. This has so many possible applications, where does one begin? But you see, I think, that at least the Lord **DESERVES** our love and adoration. He has been merciful to us, dear ones, in what Jesus has done for us, and He deserves any gifts we may desire to offer Him.

The Meaning of "Offering" So, we get to this word "offering." I have chosen it as a "great word about stewardship", simply because it is one of those religious words we hear so often. It is good that we should understand what it means. The word "offering", as it is used in the Bible, simply means this: **A GIFT TO THE LORD**. If you still think it incredible that we could give a gift to the Lord at all, know that I agree with you. But the giving of gifts to the Lord is a theme

that runs right through the Bible, from cover to cover. Last time we looked at the word tithe. The TITHE is different from the offering. The tithe was a national tax, essentially. It was required and it was not something associated with WORSHIP, so much.

Now, this series is on the overall subject "stewardship." We said that "stewardship" means *my management of God's gifts to me*. A growing and healthy Christian is aware that God has bestowed a great many gifts on him. A real gift is something that is given out of love, isn't it? And God, out of His great love for us, has given us a great many things. He then expects me to manage those gifts well, for Him (so to speak), and not to waste them. He expects me to manage my time well, since He has given me life here and a period of time to accomplish various things. He expects me to manage my abilities well; to USE them, whatever they are, for HIS Kingdom and to use them faithfully for many years. He expects me to manage whatever possessions and money I have, and to manage these well, all the while mindful of what's really important in life and what is not. This whole OUTLOOK on the gifts God has given me, is what we call "stewardship." And in my overall stewardship and discipleship, there is the side of it that I pay my taxes and act as a responsible citizen in general, out there. And there is the side of it that reflects IN HERE, when I intentionally worship Him on the Lord's Day.

Now, in this church at least, YOU get to do the evaluation of how good a steward of God's gifts you are. The evaluation and worship of God you give Him in your stewardship are *your* business, ultimately.

And an OFFERING is basically any GIFT to Him you may choose to "offer" Him, and during times of worship. You may make all kinds of private offerings on Tuesday mornings and Friday nights--after all, He wants and expects my whole being (and body too) to be His. But "offerings" relate mainly to gifts given to God DURING WORSHIP.

In the Old Testament, the study of "offerings" is somewhat complicated. There was a whole **system** for making offerings to the Lord, at least formal offerings, which had to be strictly adhered to. Some offerings were absolutely mandatory for all citizens of Israel. Other offerings were more voluntary. There were three basic TYPES OF OFFERINGS in the Old Testament, before Christ came:

† **Atonement Offerings** - for unintentional sin or ceremonial uncleanness

NOTE: strictly speaking, any intentional trespass of the Law of God was a capital offence--requiring the death penalty!

Examples: the "sin" offering and the "guilt" offering



Dedication Offerings - an introduction to God's acceptance & delight

Examples: the "burnt", "cereal" and "drink" offerings



Fellowship Offerings - voluntary and extra gifts

Examples: the "peace", "wave," "thanksgiving," "vow" and "free-will" offerings.

Offerings were to be in this order too, Atonement for sin, Dedication to God and Fellowship with Him. He will be approached with a certain LOGIC and order, you see. God was very specific in how these offerings were to be made and under what conditions. In **Exodus 29:10-34** we have a good example of this ORDER for making offerings. A person could not just haphazardly walk up to the altar and sort-of throw down a pigeon and say, "well, now I've paid Jehovah off for another week." Not that folks didn't sometimes try to pull that off--they did, but you couldn't EVER approach God like that, if you expected God to be pleased with the gift. There was a very definite SYSTEM to making offerings to God, to worship Him through the giving of gifts. But there had to be HEART in it, then as now too. I honestly believe God would rather a believer never give a cent to a church if they are going to do it without faith and love for Him and a prepared heart. If my gift to Him is done thoughtlessly, do you think He will delight in it? Do you think I will sense His blessing in return? He will not and I will not.

Offerings were a big part of the whole WORSHIP EXPERIENCE in the Old Testament. There was also singing and praying and hearing the Word, but the offering of sacrifice was a big part of it then.

This is really why I don't have any problem at all with placing my financial offering in a plate that is passed during the service. We choose not to do that here, but it is surely a biblical kind of thing!

"Offerings" in the New Testament It is very interesting that Jesus Himself, THE sacrifice for man--the "lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world"--UPHELD the O.T. sacrificial system. He went to the Temple at Passover and fully participated in the passover meal. He commanded the lepers to go the priests to undergo ritual cleansing and to *bring the required offerings, too*. In

Matthew 5:23,24, during what we call the "sermon on the mount", Jesus didn't reject the giving of offerings in worship, but said that a person must first be reconciled to one's brother before one can be reconciled to God and really worship Him with a pure heart.

But after Jesus died and rose from the dead, the whole system changed and radically so. Jesus FULFILLED the entire O.T. system of sacrifice and all the offerings. Israel would soon be wiped out as a nation (in 70 A.D.) by the Roman legions, and so the tithe-system would be gone too. And in that wonderful New Testament book (which might just be my favorite!) called the Epistle to the Hebrews, we understand that Jesus is NOW the high priest. He has fulfilled all that of which the O.T. was just a shadow and what we call a "type." In this N.T. "age" in which we live, we have tremendous freedom and liberty to *really* worship God. We do NOT have freedom to go about worship haphazardly or carelessly or thoughtlessly or selfishly. Do you understand this?

But in Christ we are starting to experience a NEW covenantal arrangement; a NEW kind of worship. We worship God, as Jesus said we would, *in spirit and in truth*. Look please at that Book of Hebrews for a moment at **13:15** at one of my favorite verses in that book: *Through Him [Jesus] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.* In Christ, actually THROUGH Him--as having to go through an intermediary when you go see someone important--we bring an offering to God, a GIFT to Him. It is our praise. It is actually like an O.T. sacrifice. It is worship and it gives God delight.

I think its really special when we have some kind of testimony time or time of sharing, and someone that we don't hear stand up in public often, shares a thanksgiving or a praise or a testimony. You know, coming from them, it is a SACRIFICE. It takes some effort and risk...

In other words, for us the word **offering** is a highly spiritual word. It isn't some mechanical function we perform out of obligation. Making an offering is a direct expression of thanksgiving and praise. For us, the word "offering" is going to COME UP as often as we think about His worthiness and His love *for us*. Now, how often is that? Pretty often, I should think.

I make an offering to Him when I sing a Christian song.
I make an offering to Him when I share a verbal testimony, even
if it seems feeble and weak.
I make an offering to Him when I give up my seat in here for someone
else.

I make an offering to Him when I give attention to really praying in an intercessory way for someone *e/se's* needs.
I make an offering to Him when I support the work of this church financially.

The N.T. does give us some guidelines for the giving of gifts to the Lord. It says He looks at the heart, and if you have a grudge or some problem with someone—it may be a family member, more often than not—your worship of God is going to be hindered until you attempt reconciliation. God has called us in the church to PEACE and to a new lifestyle of peace!

The N. T. tells us that financial giving isn't supposed to be *governed* by the O.T. tithing system. Our financial offerings to God should *outdo* the tithe-system of the O.T. It should be governed by sacrifice of praise, reflecting just how thankful we are as Christians. It should be governed by a systematic approach and most of all with CHEERFULNESS, the fruit of lips and a heart that give thanks to His name. That is what "offering" in the New Testament sense is all about, dear ones.

The offering isn't just what I put in the envelope or the box. It is a HEART of praise that goes into the box *first*. May we be a church which offers up MANY kinds of gifts to the Savior and to His Father. May we be overflowing with thanksgiving and adoration for Him. May we be like the little child who runs up and hugs her Daddy, and says, "Daddy, I made this for you today, Daddy, I love you!"

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Teaching Ministries of Dartmouth Bible Church

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Series: *Great Words About Stewardship*

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Lesson 5 July 5th, 1992

The Fifth Word: *Cheerful*

Introduction In our prayer list today is a prayer request for a fellow whom many of you will fondly remember: Audie Brockel. Audie needs us to pray for God to lead him clearly in relation to whether he should accept a job as pastor of a church in South Dakota where he and his family live. Audie was a member of our church for about 5 years and one thing I always appreciated about him was his constant cheerfulness. Even when Audie was down, he was up, I think! It wasn't put on--he is just one of those naturally cheerful people who are always glad to see you, smile most of the time and just have a lot of raw, basic JOY in their lives. I love people like that, don't you? And a few of *you* are like that too, but I won't say who...

Cheerfulness is a quality that most everyone enjoys in someone else, even if they can't always conjure it up in themselves as much as they would like. When you get around it, it lifts your spirits. It just makes that nasty old cynicism melt away and you feel better for having been around that cheerful person. The thing is, that God likes His people to be cheerful too, and today I would like to say some things to you **first** about godly cheerfulness in general, briefly, and **second** about **cheerful stewardship** since "stewardship" is the general theme of this sermon series.

Godly Cheerfulness To be cheerful means to be friendly and kind. In Proverbs 22:9 we read *He who is generous will be blessed.* A more literal translation than "generous" is "has a good eye," and we would say, *He who looks with kindness will be blessed.* A person who is cheerful, friendly towards those around him or her will be happier. God is doing this in us, folks. Part of what the Holy Spirit is working overtime to produce in us is the fruit of JOY, and sometimes--*sometimes*--you can actually SEE joy in a Christian; or at least God *intends* for us to see it. Godly cheerfulness isn't necessarily a slobbery, overbearing kind of affection. I must say that if someone grabs me and starts planting smooches all over my face and bear hugging me, well, it takes me back a little. I'm not altogether comfortable with excessive affection. (My Mom would say "that's the Dane in you, son").

Godly cheerfulness is not smiling through the gritted teeth of denial, either. It isn't a refusal to admit that sometimes I've got problems. I have hurts, insecurities, fears and so

forth. The Holy Spirit does not produce the defense mechanism of denial. But even if I have ongoing struggles against the flesh and maybe certain hardships I just have to live with, I can still be cheerful in a godly way. Especially when I know I'm going to be with my brethren in Christ. It is immature to insist on dragging other people into something I'm struggling with by refusing to be generally friendly or cheerful. It is mature to say to myself, "OK, I don't have to indulge my hurts, insecurities and fears when I'm with the brethren." I remember one elderly person I knew in Blacksburg, VA, who whenever I would see that person and ask how they were, they would respond with a litany of all the physical maladies they were suffering and in great detail. I got so tired of hearing the medical tally sheet every time that I found myself avoiding that older saint.

My brethren need me to be friendly. Who wants to go to a church or a Bible study where the general feeling is depressed or somber. I want to come out of the fellowship *happy*. So, folks, when you see each other here do these things which enhance the feeling of friendliness:

- a. Make eye contact. Whether you are aware of it or not, this gives acknowledgment to the other person.
- b. Smile at them. I ask you: what does it cost to smile? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And it gives the other person a blessing.
He who looks with kindness will be blessed.
- c. As you're making eye contact, ask them sincerely, without being patronizing, "how are you doing today?"
- d. When they tell you how they are, respond with something kind. Don't lecture them or use it as a jumping off point to start talking about yourself. That is not cheerful; it's self-indulgent. Cheerfulness is really a **gesture of love**, and the Bible tells us that love "seeketh not its own," doesn't it? The apostle Peter told the early believers to *greet one another with a holy kiss*.
That is godly cheerfulness, dear ones.

Dr. Howard Hendricks is fond of telling about speaking to a down-trodden Christian: "How are you, Bill?" *"Oh not too bad, brother. Under the circumstances..."* So Hendricks says, "What in the world are you doing under there?"

Now I think we have a lot of cheerful people here. This is an area where I am really proud of this church. We also have a lot of people with big struggles, too. But many of you are able to look past those struggles and bless your brethren. You're glad to see each other on Sundays and other times. You hug each other and pray for each other and give to each other. When a new-comer to this church gets past the initial awkwardness of not knowing anyone, then they begin to enjoy the little blessings that they receive from the members of the Body. Now this isn't something that we have a monopoly on; all Christians should reflect the love of Christ between themselves. Even across national and cultural barriers.

Dr. Manny Chavier is a well-known pastor in our city, and whenever he calls me on the phone, consistently, the first thing he says is, "Has

God wants us to give, folks, because we DO sense it is an honor and a joy to give. God *loves it*, He delights in it, when one of His children gives to Him out of joy and cheerfulness, no strings attached. I believe God wants us to HAVE FUN in it!

One of our brethren this week, made a gift to us of an air conditioner. When he came by and installed it, he had obvious joy and delight in doing it. He got a kick out of it. And seeing that in him, gave ME a blessing. That is cheerful giving, and I think that brother HAD FUN at it!

Some years ago, one of our members gave me my Kramer electric guitar and my electronic chorus box. He and his wife surprised me one day with it, and in addition to obvious joy it gave me, HE did it cheerfully. There was no expectation on my part—it was a total and complete surprise! That was cheerful giving, and I think that couple HAD FUN at it!

When our missionary Tom Monk was here a month ago, you, the Body, gave a one-time, spontaneous gift to their ministry of \$834. You were obviously moved by his presentation, and no one twisted your arms; in fact, it was just a plate in the foyer. This was cheerful giving & fun too!

God loves it when we give an offering to Him cheerfully. It makes Him feel loved. It demonstrates honor for Him and affection. It gives Him worship and adoration. His **response** is to "make grace ABOUND to you" and to return MORE to you that you in turn can use again to give to the ministry. This is what Paul says in verse 8. There is a direct, Biblical connection between what I HAVE available to give next week or month and what I gave last week or month. God blesses the person who worships Him in laughter!

Financial Giving, Done Cheerfully 2 Cor. 8 is about financial giving, dear ones. It is *not*, however, specifically about regular giving to their own work. It was about giving to a relief project. But the principles of giving are universal, because giving is worship, and God is unchanging. He looks at the heart, and as Calvin put it, "*liberality [in giving] is estimated by God, not so much from the sum, as from the disposition.*" So, do these things:

- a. Talk to the Lord about your giving; ask Him to give you guidance about what you should do. Bring Him in on it. If you have a Christian spouse, then pray together about it.
- b. Decide in advance what your giving this week is going to be. If you're married, and your spouse is a Christian, decide it together.
- c. Participate together in the giving—this spreads the sense of joy around, and it is a family thing.
- d. When you give, let it go. Remember that your giving is first and foremost from you to God, and you are doing it as part of your faith because you can't see God yet.
- e. Do not give more than you can.
- f. Do not give less than you can.
- g. Be open to one-time or special giving projects. They can add

anyone told you they love you yet today?" At first it bugged me. And now I find myself going out of my way to tell my family I love them, and to tell others when I see them or talk to them that I appreciate them. So, I guess I'm slowly growing, despite my Viking heritage.

Cheerfulness is essentially NOT WITHHOLDING from someone. It is GIVING to that person. It is opening the gate and letting them have something that you know would bless them. I think its important that a Christian church make the concerted effort to bless each other, don't you? And this we do a fair job of, dear ones; a fair job.

Cheerful Stewardship Now this word applies in the 2 Cor. 9 passage to the financial support of the ministry, too. It applies to HOW I manage the gifts that God has entrusted to me; the resources I have at my disposal to use for Him. Remember, when I talk about "stewardship" I am talking about the subject of MY MANAGEMENT OF GOD'S GIFTS TO ME. He has given me a great many things, as He has you too. And part of Christian living is us giving serious consideration and thought to how we manage the time, money, abilities, family and so forth, that God has entrusted us with.

In verse 7 Paul wrote that "God loves a cheerful giver." The Greek word for "cheerful", $\eta\lambda\alpha\rho\omicron\nu$ (**hilaron**), is used only here in the entire N.T. **Hilaron** is the word from which we get our word "hilarious." It means *laughing, a jovialness*. When we attach that word now, to financially supporting the ministry, it means giving money and time and skills and abilities with laughter and happiness and joy. Dear ones, this is one of the GREAT WORDS about stewardship. It may just be the **most important** "great word." Because, as I wanted to get across last week, your giving to God is your WORSHIP of Him. When I give an offering (last week's "great word"), that's part of my worship of the Lord. And He desires His worshippers to worship Him with laughter and joy.

D 3 kinds of given

Paul makes it clear exactly what he means by giving cheerfully, by way of the opposite: *not grudgingly or under compulsion*. To give to God "grudgingly" is to do so with reluctance, "grieving after what is given as so much lost" (Charles Hodge). If a person decides, prayerfully, "this is what I'm going to give to this project," that is the opposite of giving grudgingly, with regret.

Now, maybe you have done this before. I have. And if you give to something and then regret it, doesn't it leave you feeling empty? That's because you know it was not out of worship.

The great Presbyterian theologian, Charles Hodge said this: *Unless we feel it is an honor and a joy to give, God does not accept the offering.*

The other thing that Paul says contrasts with giving cheerfully and with purpose, is if we give "under compulsion." This means "of necessity," or "constrained by circumstances to give, when you prefer not to do it (Hodge)." It's the feeling of *having to give*. Paul had no wish to **extort** anything from them against their will (John Calvin).

real joy and FUN to your giving.

Lead-In to Next Week's "Great Word" But you know, the word *cheerful* is not the only guideline God's Word gives us. New Testament giving is governed by several "great words." Another word is *systematic*. If giving is only done according to the *qualitative* criteria, cheerfulness, the emotional feeling of joy, and no other criteria are used in stewardship, then the giving will, unfortunately, be erratic and undependable. If a church is to manage ITS resources well and be able to plan ahead, it needs to have a budget. In order to have a budget, we need to have some feeling for what we THINK God's people are going to systematically "purpose in their hearts." Yes, DBC gave a wonderful love-gift to Tom Monk's ministry, spontaneous and freely given. But then our own offering average for the next month decreased significantly. Our Treasurer is now having to dip into savings to pay bills.

So, it is also part of N.T. giving to give systematically, and that is what I will try to lay before you next week, Lordwilling! Then we'll look at a plan and strategy for developing my own stewardship of God's gifts and resources which is at the same time cheerfully given and systematically thought-through. I hope you'll be back with us for the next piece of the puzzle, which I trust will provide a full picture of Christian stewardship.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Teaching Ministries of Dartmouth Bible Church

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:10-12; 9:5, 7a; I Cor. 16:1,2

Series: Great Words About Salvation

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Lesson 6 July 12, 1992

Stewardship

The Sixth Word: SYSTEMATIC

Introduction One of my summertime memories comes from the summer of '67 when I was visiting family on the shores of Lake Superior in Wisconsin. I made a friend named John, a little older than me, and John was a car buff. In fact his pet project was a '56 Chevy that had an 302 engine, a shortened frame and wheels...and no more! And we drove that monster around town, us sitting on a board and me hanging on to the firewall for dear life! That car had the three basic components that a car has got to have--and it had and nothing else! (But we sure had fun!)

An automobile must have three basic components to be useful. It must have an engine, a frame/drive-mechanism, and wheels. A car with an engine and frame, but no wheels may make a lot of noise, but it won't go anywhere. A car with a frame and wheels but no engine may *look* interesting, but it won't go anywhere. A car with an engine and wheels, but no frame--well, that's too hard to imagine! All **three** basic components are necessary to make a car useful.

For a church ministry to operate well, the people's **stewardship** for that church needs three basic components too. You can't have just two out of three--you need all three. Remember: stewardship is "my **management of God's gifts to me.**" An important part of my walk with the Lord is in how I manage the gifts He has given me.

If I have seven nights a week to do something with after work, I make certain choices about how I'm going to use those evenings, right?

If I make \$400 a week, then I make certain choices about how I'm going to use that money, right?

On a more theological level, if I know that I have a gift of shepherding--the spiritual enablement to guide, feed and care for people in the Body of Christ, then I make certain choices about how I'm going to use that spiritual gift, right?

And how I manage the gifts He has given me has three basic aspects. You and I need to give full attention to all three. The first aspect is that word we looked at last week, **cheerfulness**. You and I need to make our contributions to the church--our contributions of raw time for serving, our contributions of financial support and the contribution of our spiritual gifts--with cheerfulness. God wants us to laugh and have fun at it. It gives Him great joy when we give our "offerings" to Him in this way. And it pleases Him when those offerings we each make to Him, as individuals, are done **sacrificially**, and that is the **third** aspect, which, Lordwilling, we will look at *next* week. But the middle word of these three, is the

word **systematic**. Our stewardship needs to be cheerful, **systematic** and sacrificial. This is the New Testament pattern of giving, folks. When you study stewardship in the New Testament you see these three priorities. You see the Lord affirming these three components in the N. T. And for really being a good steward of all that God has given you, you need to understand and practice all three components in your stewardship.

What We Mean By "Systematic" Now today, we're looking at the second component, **systematic**. I admit this isn't a word you're going to find in your N.T. But it IS a plain principle there, and a vital one. Doing something in a "systematic" way, means to do it in a **planned** way and in a **committed** way. It means that you look at a need and you **PLAN** how to help alleviate that need. And it means that you **COMMIT** to supporting that need for as long as your support is needed. Jesus mentioned this in **Luke 14:28** (let's look at that verse). Its interesting that Jesus is pretty much appealing to common sense there, and saying that smart people don't undertake a commitment without first counting the cost; without first looking it over *systematically*.

We need to "do stewardship", to make these decisions with cheerfulness but we also need to be doing it systematically. If we were to try to run this church based on the giving that people want to provide cheerfully **ONLY**, the ministry here would be erratic. It would be lots of FUN but there would be no discipline and no dependability to it.

If we were to say, "let's have a children's program here on Wednesday nights, and whoever feels like coming and cheerfully giving us your time on some Wednesday nights when you feel like it, then *come on out!*" then how good a program would we have? Some weeks this one would be here and other weeks that one would be here, and some weeks you would have more adults here than kids and other weeks you would have **NO** adults here. Would that be a good way to run a ministry? But you say, "well, all your leaders here would be UP whenever they *were* here." True enough, but the ministry would be undependable with no commitment for systematic giving of time by enough leaders. Their giving--their *stewardship* of time--needs to be **ALL THREE**: cheerful, systematic **AND** sacrificial.

To give in a **systematic** way is a basis for encouragement for the ministry. It is an encouragement to the leaders and the faithful workers when the same people can be counted on to mow the lawn here, to visit, to open up their home for a Bible study each week, to teach a Sunday School class. I know it is easier on *you* if you do not have to be depended upon. But the church with no feel for commitment in it--where no one gives *systematically*--that is the church which, nine times out of ten, does not last. It has been said that one of the big things about MY generation is their deep reluctance to make commitments. In a church where the people use their spiritual gifts, give their time and give their money in a systematic way, there is the feeling that the troops are committed to that ministry. They feel it is important, just like that monthly phone bill you make sure gets taken care of on time. N.E. Telephone knows they can count on you to pay for their service and so they leave your line connected!

Evidences of a Systematic Approach in II Corinthians

You will not find the word "systematic" in your Bible concordance or dictionary, but you will find the practice. In **2 Cor. 8 & 9** we read Paul's words to the Corinthian believers concerning their financial stewardship. I am particularly interested today in what we read in **verses 10-12**. Notice here that the Corinthians started out with a **PLAN** to financially support other believers. Then, they kept up with the plan for a time and then began perhaps to slacken up. That is what prompted Paul to write these words.

He tells them to FINISH the project, to see it through to the end. But he does not extort money from them. He is very careful to point out that he doesn't expect people to give what they do not have. From the "stores" of what they DO have, he wants them to give sacrificially, even as Jesus Himself did (verse 9). But he does not expect them to pledge and commit what they do not have (verse 12). I find something interesting in Paul's "giving system" in verse 13. He didn't want the Corinthians to think that Paul was draining *their* pockets to make it easy for other believers, elsewhere. But he DOES feel that there is something wrong with believers in one place having an abundance while others are truly suffering. This is part of what it means to be in the universal Body of Christ.

So this systematic giving that Paul is talking about envisions a PLAN; a plan with some forethought to it. It envisions a COMMITMENT by a local church to see that plan through to completion. And Paul's picture of systematic giving envisions a plan which is FAIR.

Our stewardship of the resources God has placed us in charge of, needs to have a PLAN for how we're going to use it; our stewardship needs to involve a systematic commitment to that plan, and we need to be sensitive to the most pressing needs around us. When it comes to your time and money, let me share a few other principles about "doing stewardship" in a systematic way:

Other Principles for Developing a Systematic Approach to Stewardship

1. My stewardship needs to be IMPORTANT to me. A sign of a mature Christian is when they do not waffle on their giving, viewing it as something to do when its easy to do. My stewardship needs to be a REGULAR part of my life, just as worshipping the Lord, either privately in my quiet-time, or corporately with the Body of believers are regular and important parts of my life. I think that new Christians need to be taught this, and our children need to learn it from us as parents. And it is healthy to see and enjoy seeing each other modelling it together. We don't need to get paranoid about our giving, if it is done cheerfully, systematically and sacrificially. The amount is secondary; the priority I give it is primary!
2. Regular needs should take precedence over special projects - I call this a FIRST-FRUITS system. Off the top of your own personal store of resources, you make sure the regular needs are taken care of. You only have so much time and energy; so much money to work with. It is important that your use of that time and energy and finances gives FIRST attention to the needs of those closest to you. I'm simply saying that the systematic component of stewardship will recognize a set of priorities in giving my time and money.

On May 31st we took an ABOVE-AND-BEYOND offering for our missionaries, the Monks. The offering was \$834, an offering that made me proud and joyful because I said, "Man, these people have open hearts!" But then for the next four weeks the regular offering--the thing that pays salaries, insurance, electricity, Sunday School materials and so forth--not very exciting stuff, I admit--went through the floor. I think a number of folks must have said, "well, I'll give my regular offering this month to this special project."

3. Since the New Testament does not prohibit a tithing mentality--taking 10% and giving it to the Lord's work, I have no problem with your thinking of your giving in that way; hence using a TITHING system; so long as you don't limit yourself or close your heart to the needs of those around you. One of the dangers of a systematic approach to giving, whether it is time or money or where you employ your spiritual gift, is in becoming *too systematic, too routine, rigid and inflexible*. If we allow our hearts to get "crusty" like that then our giving ceases to be worship and it ceases to be an "offering, well-pleasing in His sight." Taking a tithing approach gives SYSTEM and STRUCTURE to your giving. It

encourages the Body because you are dependable and regular. It makes the Lord's work a real priority in your life. It provides discipline, and if there is one thing we lack in the modern American church it is spiritual discipline!

4. A third principle for developing a systematic quality to your stewardship is to give it attention on a **WEEKLY BASIS**. In **1 Cor. 16:1,2** we read some interesting words from the first (really the second) of Paul's letters to the Corinthian believers. In **verse 1** we read *as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also*. So, what he was going to tell them to do in verse 2 he had told other churches to use the same system. It was **ON THE FIRST DAY OF EVERY WEEK**, that is, on Sunday (Saturday, the Sabbath day, was the *last* day of the week), that the church was to take up a collection. It was a weekly thing, regulated by how each person did financially that week. In those days people didn't get a weekly check, the same amount pretty much each week. Their income could fluctuate dramatically. Paul knew this and says "Hey, each of you, see how you stand this week, and then put aside your offering on the first day of the week."

Now there is a trend in our church that I want to speak to. It is the trend to give monthly. Now there is really nothing wrong with this; but it is the **reasons** I hear for giving monthly that disturb me. I have heard people say, "It costs too many checks to do it weekly." And, "I don't want to have to be bothered with it every week." And, "I can't remember to do it every week." Well, dear ones, I remind you that this is **WORSHIP** we are talking about. Your giving to DBC is not like paying a bill to the electric company. If it is for you, then you have a spiritual problem. You need to re-examine your whole approach to God and re-assess how you feel about Him and why you are doing any giving at all.

5. The final principle I want to share with you, about systematic stewardship, is to **BUDGET CREATIVELY** for one-time Spirit-led giving. There are going to be times when the Lord lays it on your heart to do something out-of-the-ordinary, **ABOVE AND BEYOND** your normal giving. Does this sound greedy of me to put this before you? It would if I was a greedy person or if this was something which was not *fundamentally* tied to your worship of God. But dear ones, your stewardship and **HOW SERIOUSLY** you take it, **IS** fundamentally tied to your worship of God. Again, it is not so much the amounts that the Lord is concerned with--I will say much more about this next week. It is the heart that He looks at, and a heart that takes stewardship at least as seriously as it does making sure the obligation to **COM**Electric is met is a heart that the Lord can bless.

Remember, our stewardship is not **ONLY** to be systematic. It is to be cheerful too. The car cannot run without all **THREE** components. As I cheerfully decide what kind of time for ministry and how much of my finances I'm going to give to the Lord, I factor that into a systematic way of thinking. This is good stewardship and it is New Testament stewardship!

Conclusion Now for those of you who say, "well, this message wasn't about Jesus," I challenge you, "wasn't it?" Knowing Jesus Christ is not just *knowing things about Jesus Christ*. It is serving Him; inviting Him to take control of every area of your life; dedicating your whole life and experience over to Him; knowing Christ is to make Him Lord, and to acknowledge that all that you have--time, money, abilities--have been lovingly **LOANED** to you by Him. He is worthy, dear ones, of my complete submission, and of yours.

Series: **Great Words About Stewardship**
Scripture: 2 Cor. 8:1-5,9; Mark 12:41-44

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 7 July 19, 1992

The Seventh Word: *Sacrificial*

Introduction When I was young, it was the time when it was becoming increasingly OK in our society to utter certain four-letter words. I can't say as I ever had my mouth washed out with soap--in fact, my folks were pretty nonchalant about such infractions. My generation really has no great resistance to hearing and saying certain four-letter words--they're all over the place now! In fact I heard recently that Howard Hendricks commented not too long ago that he occasionally feels a real need to get out into the real world and to "smell the smoke" ;to get around some real guys. Hendricks said that "unless I hear a few 'hells' and 'damns' *out of context* once in a while, I think I'm really starting to lose touch..." (quoted by Dr. Bill Lawrence, 7/8/92 at Dallas Seminary Alumni luncheon, Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Mass.).

But there is one nasty word that my generation (at least) really cringes when it is uttered. Its not a four-letter word, its a nine-letter word and I can't tell you that I, myself, have yet become immune to cringing when I hear it. Its a word that when lots of people my age hear it, they go, "Oh! Don't say that word here! Its too foul. We don't use that kind of language around here! Go outside if you have to say it!" Would you like to hear it? Maybe I'll just say it quietly--Its the word **sacrifice**. Now *there's* a word to curl the hairs in your ears, laddies!

Certain other modern day "obscenities" don't bother folks my age too much; words like "donation", "contribution", "offering", "community service." These are reasonable words; they're acceptable words, as long as they're not spoken in mixed company *too* often. But **sacrifice**, there's a word that even the saltiest dog on the docks, even the most debauched drug dealer, even the most sociopathic serial killer will be loathe to let slip from his lips! Its a CUSS WORD today, folks. It hurts and it gives pain to us upwardly mobile, 200 megabyte, hot-tubbers.

Maybe you've heard this one before... A pig and a chicken were walking down the street, arguing who made the greatest contribution to society when they passed a sign which read, *Ham and Eggs*. The pig then said, "Ah, now I've got you--you give out of your abundance, but with me its a real sacrifice."

I've used this one before too... A pastor was talking to his farmer friend and he asked the farmer, "If you had 100 horses, would you give me 50?" "Certainly" the farmer said. The pastor then asked, "If you had 100 cows, would you give me 50?" "Yes" said the farmer. Then the pastor asked, "If you had two pigs, would you give me one?" The

farmer said, "Now cut that out, Pastor, you know I only have two pigs."

But Christians, I mean *real* ones--we're supposed to be different. And in fact, let me encourage you: we *are* different! For us, the word **sacrifice** is a cherished word. I do not want to inflate you falsely, but this is something which I see in DBC quite often! The examples of sacrifice are many, here. Whether you see them often or not I do, and that is one reason we like to have a time of encouragement, affirmation and public appreciation every three months as part of our QBM, so that you DO have the opportunity to hear about the sacrifices that go on here! And, you see it in many evangelical churches too. Sacrifice is at the CORE of who we are, isn't it?

1 Cor. 5:7 *Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened, For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*

Rom. 12:1 *I urge you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

Phil. 4:18 *But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.*

Heb. 13:15,16 *Through [Christ] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give praise to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

For Christians, the word **sacrifice** is no obscenity! It is a precious word. It is at the root of our faith. It has bought us heaven, for sure. And it has invaded our lives here, before we get to heaven.

It should be no surprise to you then, dear ones, when I find this as one of the "great words" relating to our stewardship of God's gifts to us. Remember, our stewardship is part of our sanctification. The decisions I make on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis about how I'm going to use my time, money, property, skills, spiritual gifts, **these decisions** are not somehow immune from the call of God. God does not look at us and divide up our lives as part ours and part His--"this part of your life is for you to indulge, and this part over here, this is mine and you need to set IT aside for me..." No dear ones, my WHOLE LIFE is His. And everything I have is His. Now, if that sounds pretty strict, remember this: Jesus bought you, fair and square. And while there is no cost to enter INTO that saving relationship with Him--it is free of charge, a free-GIFT in fact, there IS a very HIGH COST to continue to follow Him and to GROW in His grace. Second, remember that He is no harsh boss! He is not like some of you who must live with a boss who is arbitrary, selfish, unfeeling and overly demanding. As your main "boss"--your *Lord*, your *King*, Jesus is also your best friend, your betrothed for heaven, your redeemer and your shepherd. He loves us deeply. Who, in a rational frame of mind, would not *want* a Master like Him?

Now we come to the task of laying out HOW this word "sacrifice" figures into my management of God's gifts to me.

You may have thought at some point, "If I pay my tithe (whatever *that* is) why can't God just leave me alone? Why can't He just take payment and leave it at that? Why did He have to sew the word **sacrifice** all through His Bible so much. Why did He have to make *that* word the BEHAVIOR that He said He was going to call a "fragrant aroma" and "well-pleasing?" This may seem a little crass to you, but

is an honest example of how we *might* just be tempted to think...

But God does love it when we give back to Him in a **sacrificial** way. He loves it when we give cheerfully, when we take our stewardship seriously enough to perform it systematically, and when we are so moved by His sacrifice for US, that we perform it sacrificially, being **JUST LIKE HIM!** He loves it, dear ones. Its the kind of worship of Him that He says, "I'm going to sit here and really enjoy my servant, Bill, who evidently really loves ME right now! Hey, Gabriel, hey Michael, come here--check this out!" Sacrificial stewardship on OUR part gives God joy, dear ones. And if we are cheerful when we give sacrificially, and if, then, we do it with a system, He *really* rejoices in us! THAT is what the Bible teaches about giving. Consider the scene from Mark 12 (41-44, also recorded by Luke, 21:1-4).

Now perhaps some people are tired of having their collective noses rubbed in the story of the "widow's mite." But consider this episode from Jesus' life as Jesus is sitting there observing this poor widow, and Him being God at the same time, and evaluating the quality of her worship. In fact, He does (sort of) say, "Hey, guys, come here--check this out! Isn't she something?!" As He watched *what* she gave, He noted that the strict "dollar amount" meant nothing. And this is it, of course, isn't it? God didn't need her money. He doesn't need *my* money. He needs my heart. And in her still-Old-Testament thinking, that widow was giving to Jehovah her heart! It was sacrificial giving, because her heart was in it. And as Jehovah's Son sat there watching her--her, little knowing Who it was that was right near by, He said, *Truly, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors!* God doesn't measure our worship by its quantity alone. He measures it by the heart that comes with it. Dear ones, when you put something in the box, is it a sacrifice? Does it cost you something? Are you giving it with JOY and regularly because you cannot tolerate going without the joy of sacrificing too long, and does it cost you something?

In the Old Testament, there is an incident in the life of King David. The word of God becomes the "word of Gad" in 2 Samuel 24 as Gad tells David to "erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (vs.18). So, David went up to procure this little piece of land for that purpose, and Araunah was willing to GIVE him the parcel of land. But David said something pretty significant in vs. 24:

2 Sam. 24:24 However the king said to Araunah, "No but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God **which cost me nothing...**"

Sacrificial giving **COSTS** me something. Sometimes we can become sleepy, spiritually. We can become so automatic in giving that, even though you might think your giving is a *lot* compared to that guy over there, its become so automatic for you that you don't even think about it much any more. Its not costing you anything, because its just another line item in your personal budget.

Our stewardship IS our worship, dear ones. It reflects how much I really love the Savior--far more than how demonstrative you are in the music portion of a Sunday morning worship service! Anyone can SING loudly. But we need to GIVE LOUDLY. Not as the Pharisee who boasted in public, *I pay tithes of all that I get!* I don't mean "loudly" literally. I mean "loudly" in God's ears! My stewardship is those decisions I make for the use of my time (actual hours and minutes), my money (actual dollars and cents), my talents and spiritual gifts (actual effort and energy spent). When I have given a piece of those things, cheerfully, regularly and sacrificially,

it is a quality of worship that the God who would not spare His Son, for our redemption, loves to receive. It gives Him great joy!

This brings us back to 2 Cor. 8, and those precious Macedonian believers. Would you consider them once again for a minute? They gave sacrificially, out of poverty (vs. 2). They gave BEYOND their ability (vs. 3). Some "Pharisees" might say, "Well, *they* sure were foolish." But Paul said they gave to that extent, because they had first gave themselves to the Lord..." (vs. 5).

Sacrificial giving, is all through the Bible folks; I'm sorry, it just is. There's no way to escape it. And to really experience the JOY of giving, it needs to be a word in your own personal stewardship-vocabulary. More than that, it needs to be in your life!

If you were to really give sacrificially, I mean as a whole church, we would have no budget crisis here at DBC.

If you were to really give sacrificially, I mean maybe going without some things or privileges, and every believer in the church began to do this--for I know a few are doing this already--we would have a bigger facility.

If you were to really give sacrificially, as a whole lot of believers, our ability to support missions would probably triple, at least.

If you were to really give sacrificially, dear ones, we would not have to almost beg for enough man-power to run AWANA or Sunday School or to keep up this building...

If you were to privately, and secretly to begin to give to the Lord sacrificially, you would have more joy in your daily lives, because you would KNOW that your giving was giving joy to the Lord...

Imagine the impact for excitement around here, if over the next three months--even though it is summer, we saw an outburst of stewardship revival! What kind of affects would that have on this Body? Can that happen? Will you pray for it to happen?...

May the God who bought us with a price--a terrible price--may He move upon this body of believers to always--not just for a few months--give unto Him the use of the gifts He has put us in charge of, and to do so cheerfully, systematically and sacrificially.

A prayer: "Lord Jesus, we ask you to place us in a keen state of awareness about how much you have sacrificed for us--even though we know we shall never really fully comprehend that. We love you; make us love you more so that you are filled up with joy from *our* gratitude. In your precious name we pray...Amen.

Jude 24,25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Teaching Ministries of Dartmouth Bible Church

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts 02747



Series: Great Words About Stewardship
Scripture: I Peter 4:7-11 (esp. vs. 10)

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Lesson 8 July 26, 1992

The Eighth Word: *Everyone*

Introduction I admit it. I am a sports fan. But I'm really only interested in two sports, baseball and football. Now, these two sports are different in a lot of ways, aren't they?

Baseball uses nine players on the field at a time; football alternates between two teams of eleven. A baseball is a little hard sphere with a hard core that is wrapped in hundreds of yards of string, and a football has its own shape, is inflated with air and is hollow.

Comedian George Carlin sees some philosophical differences between the sports too:

Football is played on a "gridiron" that is always exactly 100 yards long;

Baseball is played on an ever-widening diamond that goes on forever...

A football game lasts for 60 minutes, but a baseball game might go on all night!

Football teams have names like the "Raiders", the "Steelers" and the "Packers."

Baseball teams have names like the "Angels", the "White Sox" and the "Cardinals."

But one thing about these two sports that is identical, is that every player on the field has his own **unique and necessary function**. On a football team, the cornerback has a very different task from the quarterback. The right defensive end has a very different task from the left wide receiver. But each is absolutely essential to the success of the team. On a baseball team you need Jody Reed at 2nd just as much as you need Roger Clemens on the mound. Jody doesn't do the same thing as Roger does (and he doesn't get paid as much either), but having Jody there is just as important as having that pitcher on the mound. I guarantee you, that you will never see Wade Boggs over at third base mosey on over to Roger on the mound some evening, and say, "Hey, Rog, I don't feel like you need me for this next batter so I'm just going to go have a seat in the dugout while he's up and have a GatorAid..." It just won't happen. You will also never see Phil Plantier out in the outfield just sit down in the middle of an inning, and then when asked what he was doing, say, "Well, gee, I'm kind of depressed you know, I'm not needed here-- these guys seem to do just fine and they wouldn't care if I just dropped right off the side of the earth!" I guarantee you, it just won't happen! That's because each player has his own needed place on the team and that is the way the team is *designed!*

God's Team is Designed Too Now the way I figure it, any team that almighty God has a part in will be *at least* as well designed as a team man has put together. The Bible proclaims that God has always had a "team" on the earth. That "team" has had different names over the centuries, but the manager has always been the same: God's Son, Jesus Christ. It's not my intention to trivialize our Savior's role, of course--but He has always been "at the helm," so to speak, of God's people. And He still is. And HIS team has design and planning just like a baseball or a football team. Just as the 2nd baseman has his own *finely-tuned function*--and it's radically different from the pitcher--so, each Christian has his or her own **unique function**. And each Christian is equally **necessary** to the success of the "team."

Listen to these words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the early Christian church in the city of Corinth:

...God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired (I Cor. 12:18).

The main idea here is that GOD is sovereign over the design of His body, the church. He has placed the members, individually, into His body "as He desired." Now I'm not taking that to mean that each Christian makes no personal choices about what specific *local* church he or she chooses to belong to. That is not Paul's meaning. But the Christian's *ministry* in the church, how he, personally, has been gifted and equipped by the Holy Spirit--THAT is something God takes responsibility for Himself!

Also in that 12th chapter of I Corinthians, Paul lists a bunch of spiritual gifts that were being given by the Holy Spirit at that time (see verses 4-11). In verse 11, he wrote them,

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Again: Paul said that God, the Spirit, was the One who hands out the gifts "just as He wills." So, God is the one who has designed the make-up of His body. Every Christian possesses at least one spiritual gift, one special ability or "capacity" to minister help and edification and service within the church body.

Peter's Directive Looking over now at I Peter 4, we read something that the Apostle Peter wrote on this subject. Peter's perspective was a little different from Paul's on the subject. Whereas Paul was writing to Corinthian believers who had an abundance of spiritual gifts and evidently were enjoying some freedom and luxury in their church, Peter was writing to an audience that was basically suffering persecution and hardship. So the context of I Peter 4 is dealing with how believers should think, pray and minister, in light of *living in the end times (vs. 7)*. To Peter, it was real important that believers keep their overall perspective of living in this world. As the world--IN HIS DAY, LET ALONE IN OURS, 2,000 YEARS LATER--rushes toward a tremendous climax (the Bible calls it an "apocalypse"), it becomes increasingly crucial that God's "team on the field" pull together. It becomes increasingly crucial that they *keep fervent in their love for one another (vs. 8)* and that they are *hospitable to one another without complaint (vs. 9)*. Even in Peter's day, he saw that it was becoming more and more incisive upon God's people to hold on to one another, to protect one another, to sacrifice FOR one another. In Paul's letters and in the letter to the Hebrews, we see evidence that some believers were faltering, giving up, and caving in to persecution and criticism around them. And the apostles predicted that as the REAL end-times approached, that this would *accelerate*. People would abandon the basic truth of the Gospel, their hearts would grow cold--even towards their own families, the apostles predicted, in the final of the final days. So, it was becoming absolutely VITAL for believers to hold on to one another.

When it comes, then, to Peter's mention of spiritual gifts, HE viewed spiritual gifts as tools whereby believers could **help each other survive**. They were not toys. They were not implements of entertainment, or subjects for theological hair-splitting. When God gave a special ability to a church member to minister in some special way, it was for the SURVIVAL of his brethren that he had that gift given to him! THAT, dear ones, is Peter's perspective.

Now with this scenario in mind, consider what Peter says about spiritual gifts:

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold ["many-colored"] grace of God... (I Peter 4:10).

The last "great word about stewardship" that I want to bring before you is the word EVERYONE. In this verse, Peter wrote, *As each one...* Every single Christian possesses at least one spiritual gift. This is

evident from this verse and from what Paul says too. God hasn't left anyone out. Each Christian is unique and necessary for the success of the church. The task before us is this:

1st you need to know what the gifts are.

2nd you need to know what gift or gift you have.

3rd you need to know HOW to use it within the ministry of the church body.

4th you need to start using it--"just do it."

5th you need to KEEP using it, to develop the spiritual *fruit of faithfulness* and the spiritual fruit of *patience* as you use your gift to build up, help, protect, encourage your brethren.

Your gift is NEEDED. It is no less needed than Wade Boggs' ability to "dig one out at third" is needed if the Sox are going to win the pennant! It isn't needed because we want to have a real snazzy church with all kinds of fancy ministries that we can brag around town about. It's needed for us to survive!

It's a temptation for us to think, "Hey, things aren't that bad, spiritually, today." Or you might be tempted to think, "We're pretty comfortable here; we don't need to become all alarmed and hot and bothered about spiritual conditions in Dartmouth. Things are fine around here." But dear ones, the Scripture--Peter, for instance--says to us, *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* A liberal pastor would say, "Oh, don't take that so seriously--it's just a metaphorical literary style. And Satan says, "Yeah--just keep thinking that way, dude..."

My friends, God looks upon us as "stewards" of the gifts He has given us. He has given you 168 hours a week to manage for Him. He has given you 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 years to manage for His kingdom. He has given you \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000?... to manage for Him. He has given you certain abilities and talents and spiritual gifts to manage for Him. His grace is "many-colored," and we are not all wired the same way. One person has the spiritual ability to teach; another has the basic capacity to extend mercy, freely and lovingly. One person has the ability to administrate and manage resources and people in the church; another has the capacity to help out behind the scenes...

By the way, it's not surprising that Peter only mentions two or three gifts... Not every church fellowship NEEDS all the gifts, and the Holy Spirit gives some basic ones that are real central, evidently. They fall under two headings, maybe--speaking gifts and serving gifts. When the chips are down that's what you need in a church--people who can speak: preach, teach, counsel, encourage, lead. And people who serve--they don't say a whole lot; they just ACT! They see a need, and they don't make a big verbal production about it, they just "up and meet the need."

Final Considerations on Stewardship I do not know if this sermon series will make any difference in the history of this church. It may have been just so much preaching--business as usual. But dear ones, "stewardship" is just another word for "worship." It's just another way of measuring and testing how much I love the Lord. I may sing the song *I Love You, Lord*, and that's fine. But whether I really love Him, and HOW MUCH I love Him will show up in one place: in my stewardship.

My stewardship is not my leverage with the church--sometimes people play games with the giving of their time and money--they consider it a means of power in the church.

My stewardship is not a matter between me and the government.

My stewardship is not just another line item in my family budget.

My stewardship is my BADGE that I am a recipient of the grace of God. It is by His love to me, love which I have not earned, deserved, merited, that I have what I have. It is that He is a loving and gracious God who has given me a great deal. I praise Him for what I have and I hope that I never forget that, no matter what circumstances I will face.

In the Navigator 2:7 series, Course I, there is an article called *My Heart, Christ's Home*, written in 1954 by a fellow named Robert Munger. In that article, the fellow pictures his own heart like a house, with a number of different rooms, a library, a dining room, and so forth. One of the rooms in the house of his heart is the "workshop." Let me read you this piece, in closing our series on "stewardship":

The Workshop

Before long He asked, "Do you have a workshop in your home?" Down in the basement of the home of my heart I had a workbench and some equipment, but I was not doing much with it. Once in a while I would go down and fuss around with a few little gadgets, but I wasn't producing anything substantial or worthwhile.

I led Him down there.

He looked over the workbench and do little talents and skills I had. He said, "for is quite well furnished. What are you and producing with your life for the King of God?" He looked at one or two of you little toys that I had thrown together is the bench and He held one up to me: who these little toys all that you are produhom in your Christian life?" gifts

"Well," I said, "Lord, that is the be m can do. I know it isn't much and I rea want to do more, but after all, I have no skill or strength."

"Would you like to do better?" He asked.

"Certainly," I replied.

"All right. Let Me have your hands.

Now relax in Me and let My Spirit work through you. I know you are unskilled and clumsy and awkward, but the Spirit is the Master-worker and if He controls your hands and your heart He will work through you." And so, stepping around behind me and putting His great strong hands over mine, controlling the tools with His skillful fingers, He began to work through me.

There's much more that I must still learn