

Message: Money as a Sign of Health

When was the last time you had a good laugh?

Jim Ozier shares this story: “As a little boy, it was the first time I heard my mother laugh. I mean a really hard barrel-roll laugh. Literally. I sat at her knee and listened as she read from the Readers Digest:

A little boy was given two dimes by his mom: ‘You’ve been a good boy. One dime is to buy an ice cream cone this afternoon; the other is to put in the offering plate at church tomorrow.’ As he headed to the ice cream shop he dropped his dimes and one of them rolled through the drainage grate on the sidewalk. He cried out loud, ‘Sorry God; there goes your dime!’

Jim says, ‘I’ll never forget her laughter. I guess I remembered it because as a good little boy I could relate. I’ll never forget learning that day that the church is about money and giving ... and about priorities.’”¹

I laughed when I read that story. It’s very homey with a nice moral. It’s also a reminder of the nostalgia we have for times past. How long has it been since you could buy an ice cream cone for a dime?

So, it’s a good joke. But the joke is on us if we don’t learn how to talk about money and the place it has in our lives. I’ll bet most of you came in today, read the sermon title and thought something like this:

“I wonder what project pastor’s asking us to give money to today?”

You’re safe. I’m not going to ask for a show of hands.

BTW, you’d be wrong. I am here to talk about money today. I’m not here to ask for it. I’m here to talk about money in the context of your spiritual well-being. One of the best indicators of spiritual health is our generosity. In other words, where our attention, time and, yes, money are focused. If we can’t talk about money openly and without fear, then we’re not in a healthy place, spiritually.

Winston Churchill reportedly said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” When people think of you, how do you want to be known? As I see it, there are two choices.

¹ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/article/the-stewardship-formula>

Do you want to be a person who is generous with life? When we live life from a place of abundance, we live freely, openly and willingly. Our spirit is free. We sleep well. Our minds are open to new things. Our hearts are open to others. Our doors are open. A spirit of love and hospitality fills us. We live with a passion for life. We sometimes refer to people who live this way as those who are “larger than life.”

The opposite of generous living is living from a place of scarcity. When scarcity dominates, our lives are limited. We’re trapped by fearful attitudes. We toss and turn at night. We don’t talk about things that weigh us down because we’re afraid of judgment or of somehow being less than others. Our minds are closed to new or different views. Our hearts are focused on ourselves. Our doors are closed to all but a select few. A spirit of timidity binds us. We sometimes refer to people who choose this path as those who have a “life half-lived in fear.”

This kind of choice has been on display in Charlottesville and in other cities across the U.S. When people live from a place of scarcity, they put up barriers in a misguided attempt to set themselves apart. Instead of being equal, they strive to be superior and make themselves less as they do heinous, terrible things. Their position is contrary to Jesus’ way of love. Galatians 3:28-29 puts it this way, *“In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you’re all equal. That is, we’re all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ’s family, then you are Abraham’s famous “descendant,” heirs according to the covenant promises”* (The Message).

You’re the one who gets to choose. How will you live?

Living generously touches all aspects of our life and relationships. We’re living with an attitude of gratitude. We don’t hold anything back. We’re “all in,” willing to take a risk on people with love. It doesn’t matter how much money we have (*or don’t have*), what we own (*or don’t own*), who we know (*or don’t know*), what we do (*or whether we’re unemployed*), or how many Facebook friends we have (*or whether we don’t even own a computer*). We’re willing to share our time,

energy, abilities and stuff with others because we really care for them. We're blessed by God when we bless others.

The challenge of living generously is that we're tempted to hoard. God created us to be generous. That's the DNA God gave us. Proverbs 22:9 says, *“Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.”* The poor can be those who are lacking money, self-esteem, physical capability or spiritual strength. From that view, the meaning of generosity is much broader than we know. Money is one aspect, but we aren't made of money (if there are any closet billionaires in the room - let's talk). The things that make up our being – our heart, mind, strength and spirit, are the very things God calls us to share freely, willingly and generously. Empty your internal cupboard; God will restock it with grace in abundance.

Self-interest is our kryptonite. We stretch ourselves too thin, trying to do too much. That's the message of the world. You've heard it, “You can have your cake and eat it, too!” We over-commit ourselves. Then we experience the flip side: we feel guilty because we “could do more.” I know you've experienced that frustration. I certainly have.

What can we do about it? “Do more by doing less.” You've heard that expression in other forms. Jesus talks about “the way of life” in John 14. Paul wrote a letter to the congregation in Philippi explaining it this way, *“I'm not saying that I have [it] all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: by no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward - to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.*

So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision - you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.

Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal. There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with

them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm doing it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.

But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him”
(The Message). What a wonderful lesson on putting God first.

The way we live matters. The way we treat others matters. The way we use money matters. We can't say one thing on Sunday or when we're around Christians and do another when we aren't. It's the difference between the master carpenter, who treats the wood on all sides – even the side you'll never see, and the one who just wants to collect their fee and move on, who only treats the visible surface. Don't be a hypocrite. Don't over-commit and under-deliver.

Wesley's most famous sermon on money is “The Use of Money.” That's where the phrase “earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can” comes from. That's good advice. It's based on Luke 16:9, a narrative about an unscrupulous manager. The Message puts it this way: *“Now here's a surprise: the master praised the crooked manager! Why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this regard than law-abiding citizens. They're on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. I want you to be smart in the same way - but **for what is right** - using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival, to concentrate your attention on the bare essentials, so you'll live, really live, and not complacently just get by on good behavior”*
(my emphasis).

Living this way, with generosity, isn't easy. We have to set priorities and then stick to them. We have to “walk the talk.” That doesn't mean our goals and priorities never change. We need to be intentional and seeking to serve God. That's what informed choice means.

Notice the contrast between what the Spirit teaches us through John Wesley and what the world asks. Wesley says “earn”; the world says “take.” Wesley says “save”; the world says “spend.” Wesley says “give”; the world says “keep.” Giving our time, energy and resources is a form of charity, generosity in action. Keeping what we have to ourselves out of a concern we won’t have enough if we share is fear in action.

So be wise, but be generous. We can earn, save and give our time, our attention, our passion and all we are. Our money and our calendar are good indicators of where we put our focus. But the best proof we can offer is this: those who are connected to Jesus because we invested our lives in theirs generously, willingly and with love.

I invite you to join me by reading two things that shape our focus and commitment to Jesus as God’s agents of change in the greater Corona area.

- On the cover of the program is our vision statement:
We are a church of blessings, changing the world through words and deeds of grace, showing others how to follow Jesus Christ.
- On the inside of the first page is the commitment made at our baptism and affirmed at confirmation: *We dedicate to God our prayers, presence, giving, service and witness.*

Let us live generously by faith.

Let us pray...

O God, fill us with your Spirit, the Spirit of love and boldness. Show us how to seek truth so we find ourselves in you. Lord, we find it hard to stay focused on you, for the message of the world feeds our self-interest. By your Holy Spirit, help us to trust you completely as we seek to spend our lives following you. Let us be bold witnesses of your amazing power and love. We offer you all that we are – our heart, mind, strength and spirit, for the work of your church here and around the world. We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Proverbs 8:17-19 (NRSV)

I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.

Romans 12:1-8 (NRSV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.