

GOD'S ECONOMY 3:

“Why in the World would I want to give any of my money to Legacy UMC?”

As I began this series 3 weeks ago, I read portions of a story from the Book of 1 Chronicles that recorded how King David announced all the personal wealth and belongings he was donating to the project to build a new temple. The king then enlisted and demanded all his military and governmental officials make the same declarations. Following all the leaders, the rest of the people from the nation joined and recited all they would give.

We talked about the first reason we give is because God cares so much about giving. Last week we explored how God has created us as human beings in God's own image; and part of the reflection of the divine residing in us, is the need and desire within ALL human beings, to give. Today I want to answer this question by returning to that original story, and discovering another part of the reason we give – is because God has given us everything we have, and all we are. Let's look and see if this isn't true from this ancient story. We pick it up in verse 13:

Then David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly: “O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, may you be praised forever and ever! Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength.

*O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! “But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? **Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us!** We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace. O Lord our God, even this material we have gathered to build a Temple to honor your holy name comes from you! It all belongs to you!*

I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there. You know I have done all this with good motives, and I have watched your people offer their gifts willingly and joyously. O Lord, the God of our ancestors

Abraham, Isaac and Israel, make your people always want to obey you. See to it that their love for you never changes.

I Chronicles 29:13 -18

As I read that scripture again, I noted a shift in the last paragraph from the first two. In the first two, much praise is offered and given to God for the abundant and bountiful ways God has given so much to us – “all and everything”, are the two favorite words to describe God’s bounty and generosity.

But as I considered the last paragraph I note that David shifts the focus from God – to himself, and his fellow Hebrews. I find there some very pointed instructions for how we ought to give, in response, in reaction, in like manner to the ways God has given to us. I find there 6 distinct instructions about the Hebrews giving – and I think they might help us answer the question today: *“Why in the world would I want to give any of my money to Legacy UMC?”*

Because God has given us everything we are and have...

1. **WE GIVE WITH INTEGRITY**

... you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there...

Dave Ramsey quotes Thomas Stanley in his series of books about Millionaires that one of the primary common denominators among those who are millionaires is that they are people of integrity. I think in this day and age there is nothing more valuable than integrity. I believe people of integrity might not all become millionaires – but they will have more than wealth when they die – they will have preserved their self-worth. But what does giving with integrity look like for a modern day follower of Jesus?

I think it has to do primarily with being honest – honest with yourself, honest with what you have, and what you don’t have...and honest with what you give. I visited with a couple this week who are so excited about reaching the challenge they accepted

some years ago to move toward tithing. The husband informed me they just figured out that last year they gave 9.3% of their income to God and the church, and they are hoping, planning to get to 10% this year. That is being honest with your giving.

I think it also has to do with intentionality. Our giving ought not to be haphazard – giving only what we gave last year, or only what we have in our wallet or purse that day, or only giving what we have left over. I believe part of what King David was doing in our scripture story was asking, expecting, leading the people to intentionally declare and deposit what they could each afford. Because God has given us everything we are and have...

2. **WE GIVE WITH GOOD MOTIVES**

... you know I have done all this with good motives...

We had a family in a former church I served that made a sizable donation to our church one year for the organ and music program. They helped us plan a very nice celebration of their gift, and we honored them appropriately. A year later one of the family members called and asked what we were planning to do that year to celebrate their gift, on the anniversary of the gift? The Sr. Pastor asked the person; “if we are going to have to celebrate your gift every year – then you would have to give more!” I’m not sure what their motivation was for giving – but their gift certainly came with some baggage and strings attached.

I think giving with good motives has more to do with focusing on the recipient than on the reward. I think it has more to do with giving just for the good habit of giving. Giving with good motives includes understanding that God’s Kingdom work is a worthwhile investment – even when we don’t always see immediate or direct results. I believe that giving with good motives is ultimately a heart matter; and if your heart is

right with God; and you make every effort to remember that all we have and all we are come from God – then giving with the correct motive becomes more natural and spontaneous than scripted and needing attention. Because God has given us everything we are and have...

3. **WE GIVE WILLINGLY**

...offer their gifts willingly and joyously...

You may have heard the saying from some preachers or fundraisers: “we need to give till it hurts.” I hate that sentiment! I propose just the opposite – we should give till it feels good! If you doubt this principle, and ascribe it only to an outdated OT practice, then read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. There, poor Macedonian Christians BEGGED the apostle Paul for the privilege to give their small offering to the suffering brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. People don’t beg to give if they are giving unwillingly!

Willing or willful giving means giving because we want to, not because we are expected or forced or “strongly encouraged” to give.

I’m not preaching this series this year because I want to make people feel guilty about their giving, but to educate all of us and remind all of us that God cares about giving, God has created us to give, and because God has given us everything we are and have – what other option do we have but to be givers? And what kind of givers should we be? Willing givers.

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4. **WE GIVE JOYOUSLY**

...offer their gifts willingly and joyously...

You will easily remember the verse: God loves a “cheerful” giver. But did you also know that God goes on to say that we ought **not** to give out of a sense of

obligation, or grudgingly. I'm not sure why God says that – and for the record – I'll gladly accept your “mad” money as well as your “happy” money – but God says we should give joyously. In one translation, that word is translated “give hilariously”. I do like that!

I've grown to appreciate many things as I've gotten older that I didn't when I was younger. But one of the biggest surprises that I've learned to appreciate is how much fun it is to give money away. You might think that is only true because of the amount I or you might give – but I don't think so. Giving is a joy – and giving for all the right reasons, with integrity and good motives – will produce in any of us – will produce in all of us a true sense of joy. Maybe that's part of why I so much love playing Santa Claus – I don't give much of anything having material value – but I get to give joy and it is fun! Because God has given us everything we are and have...

5. **WE GIVE OBEDIENTLY**

...make your people always want to obey you...

There is a standard taught in the OT about how much we should give. The Tithe was not just a generic name for any old amount of giving – it was 10% of whatever resources a person earned or possessed. In the NT Jesus affirmed that percentage, and Paul, records often that proportional giving is the way that followers of Jesus ought to give.

I often remind friends who claim that tithing is only an OT practice – then they are free instead to give what the NT more often speaks about – **ALL**. A couple weeks ago we sang I surrender All – I don't remember any of the 6 verses reciting: “I surrender 10% - I surrender 10% - 10% to Jesus, I surrender 10%”.

Obedience is not measured only by a simple percentage – but by keeping in heart and mind all that has been referenced so far – integrity, motive, willful, joyful – obedience is just a reminder that we as followers of Jesus must follow Him here too – in his example of giving!

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6. **WE GIVE CONSISTENTLY**

...see to it that their love for you never changes...

I believe the final instruction for us today is to give in all those other ways – and to do so consistently. I've often advocated that churches would have no clue what to do with all their money, if every person gave every week what they give when they come! Think about it. I also believe the primary indicators of churches finances (at least in this part of the country) are two things: 1) the weather 2) attendance.

I know this message is not just about giving to or attending church – we are called and expected to be consistent with our love, our grace, our mercy showing, our hospitality, our worship, and our giving – but I cannot let this pass without thanking those of you who are choosing to give electronically. That simple effort is a huge help for us as a church – and I've heard from so many of you how much you appreciate how much it helps you be consistent with your giving. It takes the pressure off the weekly offering. Last week with the ice, our attendance was down by about 100 at 9am. The offering reflected that, but was offset by the faithful ones who are giving electronically. I know it's not the end all, and it's not for all of you – but think about it – maybe even give it a try for 6 months – were still working on the t-shirt idea!

In conclusion – I want you to know, that I know – most of us are doing the absolute best we can with our giving. We are giving with integrity, with good motive, with willfulness, with joy, giving in obedience, and trying to give consistently...and I can't thank you enough. But, I also know there is always room for all of us to grow in our giving – and that growth happens when we are educated and challenged. I preach the Word, so God can do that work – I've learned a new lesson this week – and I hope you have too! I'm glad for the opportunity to give some of my money to Legacy UMC – and through this church – to God ...because what else can we do considering how much God has given to us?

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