

“StewardSHIP” (SHIPS Pt. 2)
(2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

- **“Mine”**

- Welcome to this second Sunday after Easter! Did you know in the Church Calendar we call this season “*Eastertide*” between Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost? It’s a great reminder that we don’t just celebrate the resurrection once a year—we get to live in the Resurrection Power of Christ every single day! Amen? *Let’s pray before we dive in today.*
- When you open up 2 Corinthians 8-9, you find the Apostle Paul encouraging the Christians in the city of Corinth to contribute to an offering for the church in Jerusalem, which was struggling with famine and persecution. But instead of promoting a fundraising campaign, Paul takes the opportunity to bring it all back to the Gospel: ***“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: ‘They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.’ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing***

grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:6-15)

- I’ll just rip this off like a band aid: *today, we’re talking about MONEY*. And that’s the cue for our ushers to *lock the doors—no getting off this ride ‘til it’s done, people*. (JUST KIDDING!) But, yes, we *are* talking about money. Let me talk about the goals for today: my goal is *not* that anyone would feel *manipulated*. My goal is not that anyone would feel the weight of guilt or pressure. My goal is not that someone who is *struggling* in life would feel left out or saddled with *one more burden*. My goal is not even that more people would give more money—although I certainly hope that as we respond in faith to God’s Word, there will be an increase in resources that would lead to an *increase in our Kingdom impact*—wouldn’t that be awesome? But that’s not my goal—honestly, none of those things are great reasons to preach God’s Word. We preach God’s Word because *Christ has died and Christ has risen and this Gospel demands to be shared AND lived!* That’s why we preach—even when the sermon topic is *money*.
- Here’s my real goal today: *I want all of us have God’s perspective on money*. More specifically, *I want everyone to see that the way we steward our money is one of the most practical and tangible ways that we live out the Gospel in this world*. Can I say that again? Because if the statistics about American Christianity are accurate, then *very few* believers actually get this: ***The way we use our money is one of the most practical and tangible ways we live out the Gospel.*** If you can get God’s perspective on your money and realize it has *everything to do with your discipleship*, you will be well on the way to abundant life in Christ. I want that for me, I want that for you. Most importantly, *God wants that for you!*
- Now, let’s stop for a second and do a vitals check: when I said, *we’re talking about money*, what happened for you? What did you start to feel in your body, mind, spirit? I’m sure there are some people in the room who, at the very mention of *money*, found their bodies going into a *stress response*. Just the *thought* of money, let alone talking about it *in church*, stresses you out! For others, you started checking out—it bores you to think about something so mundane in church. For some, you went to guilt and defense—you starting playing through mind, *am I doing*

enough, or here's why I'm doing enough. Maybe some of us felt the bars slam down and the guards go up like, *you're not going to talk to me about that, back off pastor!* But I also know that there are a few of us in the room who felt *excitement* and *anticipation*, even *joy* (not just the finance team!) Here's what I know: the people in the room who have *good feelings* when they hear it's a stewardship sermon, are most likely the ones who know the joy of putting this into practice. And my hope that is in time, all of us would live in that freedom and joy.

- Why is it that *money* creates such strong reactions in us? It's kind of bizarre when you think about: currency is such an abstract, impersonal thing—this idea that we use pieces of metal or paper or data to assign value to things. What could be more *lifeless* than money? Yet, it becomes so *personal*. It's not “polite” to talk about peoples' money. You might feel as uncomfortable talking about sex in today's sermon as you would about money. Why is that?
 - I think it's actually for the same reason: it all has to do with this powerful, yet deceptive word we use: *MINE*. It's *mine*. It's the same with sex and with money, both are issues of *stewardship*. It's *my body*, it's *my money*. “Mine” is an essential word for healthy boundaries, for God-given dignity and personhood. But where we run into problems is when this word *mine* moves us *away from God* instead of *towards God*. *This is mine, so get out of my way—I will do whatever it takes to control this, and nobody, not you, not church, not even God Himself is going to tell me what to do with my body, my life, my money!* Know what I mean?
- Money, properly understood, should be a good tool that allows people and societies to flourish and thrive. But in most cases, money becomes an *idol* that gives us the illusion of control and ownership—when the truth of this life is not *ownership*, but *stewardship*. This is *not* ultimately *mine*; this is *His*, and my blessing is that I get to use it, enjoy it, share it, for His glory. *That* is God's perspective on our money, our resources, everything we have!
- **God's Perspective on Money**
 - All over the Bible, there are positive and negative messages about money, wealth, and possessions—because it's such an integral part of how we live. Here are a couple highlights:

- ***“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you...Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God...You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...” (Deut. 8:10-18)***
- ***“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” (Prov. 3:9-10)***
- ***“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.” (Ecc. 5:10)***
- ***“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matt. 6:24)***
- ***“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (2 Tim. 6:10)***
- ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (2 Tim. 6:17-19)***
- That’s just a *tiny fraction* of all the Scriptures teach on money. Why does the Bible talk so much about it? Because our money becomes an extension of our will, an extension of ourselves. Your money will follow the direction of your life, until eventually, your life follows the direction of your money. How you manage your

resources shows *precisely* what you value. Or in the divinely-penetrating words of Jesus, *where your treasure is your heart will also be*.

- And this is why I'm not ashamed to preach about money—in fact, it would be negligent *not* to. How are we going to be followers of Jesus, if we're not going to talk about things that hit our hearts, our motives, our lives at the most personal and practical level?
- It's common for people to ask, *do I have to tithe? Do Christians have to tithe?* But I think that's actually the wrong question. Do you *have to* pray? Do you *have to* read your Bible? Do you *have to* go to church, worship, fellowship? Do you *have to* serve? Well, last time I checked the Good News of Jesus is that we are saved by grace through faith alone, not by any of our works: I don't *have to* do this or do that to be saved, because *He already did* and His grace is sufficient. The real question is: what will happen to my life if I trust these time-tested Biblical, spiritual principles? What will happen to my life *if I don't?*
- I believe that joyful generosity is a non-negotiable for God's people because it's the *only proper response* to the *indescribable gift* of God's grace to us. I preach and practice tithing not as a *law*, but as a *spiritual discipline*. I know faithful Christians who don't believe "tithing" is a law for Christians anymore, so instead they prayerfully give however God leads them. For me, I choose to practice the discipline of tithing because, honestly, I don't trust myself to be a consistently generous person, to handle my money in the best way, to view my wealth in God's way for God's Kingdom *unless I give my first fruits, my 10%, automatically, non-negotiably* off the top. And that's my *starting point*—my goal in life is not to increase my standard of living but to increase my standard of giving, over time. I want to figure out in any given season what I need to take care of the responsibilities God has given me, and then how can I use the rest to *sow into His Kingdom*.
- John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, taught this about wealth: **you should endeavor to use whatever God-given capacities He's given you to work as hard as you can, so you can earn as much as you can, so you can give as much as you can**. In our culture, we stop at *earn as much as you can* before getting to

the *give*—because we’re taught to prioritize our standard of living above our *standard of giving*—so no wonder we don’t get to the *giving*.

- Some studies estimate that if every American Christian actually practiced tithing, it could generate an additional \$165 billion annually for churches and charities—we could revolutionize global ministry, we could eliminate global water shortages, fund extensive missions, drastically reduce or even eliminate world hunger and illiteracy. Do you hear that? If American Christians alone practiced the discipline of tithing, we could literally *change the world in one year*. What would be the impact on God’s earth? What would be the impact on the witness of the Gospel? What would be the impact on the great commission?

- **Sowing Season**

- For now, let’s just think about Middletown, DE, here at CCC. I’m inviting you, church family, into a **Sowing Season**. You know springtime in the Northeast is when farmers start planting. I want to invite you to a season of sowing here at church. We can already see God is moving in profound ways, what if this is just the beginning? What if our sowing in faith today could help lead us into the abundant harvest God wants to bring tomorrow? This week, if you’re a disciple-member or a regular attender, you’re going to be getting an invitation to sowing season in the mail. And on the way out of worship today, you’ll get a commitment card that will give you the opportunity to commit to *praying for God’s harvest in our community and praying about your finances to discern how God is calling you to sow into His ministries in this season*. All I’m asking you to do is talk to God about it, and obey what He asks you to do—just follow Jesus.

- **Love So Amazing, So Divine**

- This isn’t something *we have to do*. This is something *we get to do*. This isn’t about pressure, guilt, or obligation. This is a *small, small way we respond to God’s indescribable gift!* If you need to ask, *Do I have to?* you’re missing the point. Start with *God’s gift*, and then you’ll understand *your giving*.
 - One of my favorite hymns is *The Wonderful Cross*. The last verse to me is one of the most powerful ever written: **“Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my**

soul, my life, my all.” That’s the heart of it. That’s *why* we give. That’s how we *demonstrate and live out* the implications of the Gospel of Jesus in our practical lives. That’s how this gets from our head, to our heart, to our hands, to the world around us that needs to know.

- *Lord, if I could make the entire created world an offering to you, placed on the altar for your glory, it would never be enough to compare to the glory you deserve, or to what you did for me on the Cross—this love is so amazing, I must give you all that I am, and I give myself joyfully to you, take my life and use it however you will. Here’s my love Lord, here’s my life Lord!* This is why we give. Would you take a prayerful look at your life this Sowing Season, and ask God what He wants you to do? Whatever you do, make it joyful, make it love. *Let’s pray.*