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TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE (Week 4) . . .

IN GOD WE TRUST

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~ Scripture: I Timothy 6:17-19 ~

OPENING

We're in the third week of the *Treasures of the Transformed Life* series.

Notice the banners behind me with the key words: *Prayer – Presence – Gifts - Service*.

Today we take up “gifts” (or “giving”).

Start with a STORY about a CHICKEN & a PIG:

It seems that this chicken and pig were walking down a country road and passed by the church where a sign outside read “Annual Fund Raising Breakfast—make a contribution and join us for a Special Feast.”

The chicken said to the pig, “Hey that’s great, let’s go in.” To which the pig replied, “No way! The menu is ham & eggs. For you that’s a contribution; for me it’s a total commitment.” ☺

With *giving*, the first thing we think about is “giving to the church”. A little on that later.

But I want to look at our overall relationship to money.

The way we view money is a window into our heart, into what drives us. A question to ponder:

What does my checkbook + my calendar say about my priorities?

One of the best summary statements of how the Bible looks at money is given by Paul in I Timothy 6:17-19—words written to young Timothy whom Paul had “appointed” to pastor the church in Ephesus. . .

¹⁷Command (Teach) 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 (trust) in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸Tell them to use their money to do good, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and willing to share with others. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of life that is truly life.

Now Dexter—er, I mean Ephesus—was a wealthy city, and the Ephesian church had many members who were well off. Paul’s advice to Timothy was to teach that having riches carries great responsibility. Those who have money (or who don’t, for that matter) must be careful not to put their hope in money instead of in the living God for their security.

- Even our money has the insignia “*In God We Trust*” to remind us what Paul urged.
- It’s been there since 1861, when Salmon Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, ordered the motto to be put on our coins. He said: “*No nation can be strong except in the strength of God. . . The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins.*”

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

Did you know that Jesus said more about money than any other subject? Throughout the Gospels, we are warned against putting too much importance on it. We are taught to make wise use of it. And we are shown that happiness does not come through it.

John Wesley said: “*When I have money, I get rid of it quickly, lest it find a way into my heart.*”

A) **Echoes Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21 – Store treasures in heaven, not on earth. . .Where your heart is, that’s where your treasure is.**

EXAMPLE: In my garage, critters have gotten into the things I have stored there; and things have rusted and molded.

B) **Matthew 19:24 – It’s easier for a camel to go thru the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of God.**

Hyperbole: How impossible for the largest of animals to fit through the smallest of openings.

Wealth can be a hindrance to salvation, but no more than many other things.

It’s not the having of money, it’s what comes along with it: “ARROGANCE” (cf. I Tim. 6:17) – which means to make exorbitant claims of rank; to be full of self-importance; to be pretentious, haughty.

C) **Luke 16:13 – No one can serve 2 masters (God & money). . .end up loving one, hating the other.**

Not the time or place to multi-task! Either end up focusing on one OR crash.

“I’ve never heard of money being a very good master” (John Ed Mathison).

D) **Matt. 19:16-22 – Story of Rich Young Man. . .**

The man asked: What do I have to do to have eternal life? Answer: Keep the commandments!

OK, well then “go sell everything, give to the poor, and come follow me.”

Should we literally get rid of everything we own? NO!

Jesus was going to the heart of the matter and the heart of the man:

WHAT HAD A GRIP ON THIS MAN’S HEART IS WHAT HE HAD A GRIP ON!

ILLUSTRATION: Reminds me of the monkey who was walking along a path one day, and saw a tree with a big hole in it. Something inside the hole caught the monkey’s attention, so he reached in to grab it. . .but couldn’t get his hand back out. The only way was to release his grip on the thing. Point: It’s only by letting go that we can really be free.

E) **Mark 12:41-44 – Story of poor widow who gave her 2 ¢ worth (which was worth even less, but it represented everything she had),**

The story suggests the more you make (and have), the harder it is to give.

STORY: A man was making \$20,000 and tithing on it. His salary eventually got up to \$150,000. One day, he came to his pastor distraught. He said, “A tithe on \$150,000 would be too much.” Pastor said, “Let’s pray that God will put you back to \$20,000 when you seemed more able to acknowledge who He is.”

Christians have always had an uneasy relationship with money. We know it is not evil to be rich . . .and, it is not good to be poor. But, money is tricky—whether you have a little or a lot. There are dangers either way: We want (crave) what we don’t have. . .OR. . .We want more. We know it won’t solve the world’s (or our) problems. Yet we hang onto it so tightly.

The truth is, writes **BRUCE LARSON, *Money Is My Other Self***. Listen:

Money is power, and, like power, it can be used for good or evil. I remember hearing once that money is really another pair of feet to walk where Christ would walk; money is another pair of hands to heal and bless the desperate families of the earth. In other words, money is my other self. Money can go where I do not have time to go, where I do not have the skill to go, where I do not have youth to go, where I do not have a passport to go. My money can go in my place and heal and bless and feed and help. A man’s money is an extension of himself.

The romance of money is that I have traded a part of my life for that money. I have given my time, my energy, my skill, my wisdom, my training, my gifts to some people who have in turn purchased this part of me and have in return given me money. I am enfeebled, I am weakened, I am diminished every time I earn money. So my money is in a real way my very life.

Now I am also free to assume that the money I have earned is now mine. I can hoard it or use it for illicit or unscrupulous purposes or lend it at exorbitant rates. But if I take that for which I have traded my life and share it with others, I am, in a tangible way, laying down my life for others as Jesus commanded.

The stewardship of money breaks down into two parts:

- WHAT TO DO WITH THE FIRST TENTH;
- WHAT TO DO WITH THE OTHER NINE TENTHS.

I. THE FIRST TENTH == WHICH IS CALLED THE “TITHE”

Where did the concept of the TITHE come from? Way back in the Old Testament when the people of Israel were settling in their land, God instructed them in **Deuteronomy 14:**

²²Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year...

And then in the very next verse, He gives the purpose of tithing:

²³so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always... (i.e.: put Him first!)

Returning the tithes & offerings to the Lord is a foundation stone in the personal life of every believer. It is a necessary expression of one’s life in Christ. It is **not** that God needs the money, **but** that I have a need to give—so that this whole area of my life (i.e.: relating to material possessions) might be ordered in the right way, and so that my whole material existence might come under His divine authority.

If the church had a \$10 million endowment and could operate without any offerings at all, we would still teach tithing as a basic necessity. Again, the purpose of tithing is not first and foremost the support of the church; it is to show who’s #1 in your life.

Now, where the tithe did get tied into the support of the work of the Kingdom and the Church is in **Numbers 35:2-3** where the people were instructed to give homes, flocks and pastures to the Levites (who were the ministers—priests or pastors—of the day).

We teach the TITHE as percentage giving:

- 10% is a goal / minimum. Not limited to that (e.g.: R. G. LeTourneau = 90%). You might begin at a level lower than 10% (say 5%), and work your way up 1% each year.
- It should come off the top. Giving God the first portion of your income (not what you have left over) shows that He has 1st place in your life (i.e.: the Source of all you have).
- Remember, this is God’s idea (not the church’s scheme to raise money). Whatever amount you & God settle on, obedience to a command in God’s Word is what’s at stake. Tithing is a sure way to make sure money is not the “other god” in your life (e.g.: “the other woman / man” in your marriage).

Since HE is the Source of all we have==full 100%==how do we handle (manage) the other 9/10?

II. THE OTHER NINE TENTHS

JOHN WESLEY helps us here. He taught us a lot about wealth and the use of money. Once he preached a sermon entitled *The Use of Money*, and the main preaching point was “Gain (earn) all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.” Let’s look at each.

A) GAIN ALL YOU CAN

This is not a call to become workaholics (e.g.: to work 80 hours a week to amass a fortune)!

This is a call to do work that suits you as an individual. . .does not degrade your health, nor harm your body or mind. . .does not endanger your soul's well-being by causing you to lie, cheat, steal, mislead, or cause you to violate your conscience or do something unethical.

B) SAVE ALL YOU CAN

This has nothing to do with 401K plans, retirement funds, stocks or bonds. A better word for it would be "CONSERVE".

Wesley challenged us "to live simply. . .not to waste resources on 'Epicurean pleasures'. . .to be content with simple foods (*ouch!*). . .to live with plain furnishings & clothing. . .and spend nothing to gratify the price of life or to impress others."

Certainly, we live "higher on the hog" than Wesley. But I would ask you:

- When does "enough" become too much?
- When do my possessions own me?
- Have we gotten to the point where we "love money and use people"? It should be the other way around?
- Shouldn't we be looking at money as a TOOL rather than a TREASURE?

C) GIVE ALL YOU CAN

We are stewards of the world, which takes in everything (e.g.: money, possessions, children, the environment). What you think of as "yours" today won't be here in a 100 years. So maybe we should be concerned for those who are hungry, poorly housed, inadequately clothed, unemployed, victims of injustice & prejudice (as long as it's not violating the precepts in His Word).

Giving is basic to Christian discipleship--a grateful response to God's actions in the world and in our lives. If we're going to give, it should be done joyfully, purposefully, sacrificially—without thought to how much we'll get back.

ILLUSTRATION: I'll admit, I'm a cheapskate when it comes to tipping. But the Holy Spirit (and Marcie) have been working on me. I now see that 15% is a bare minimum, and my generosity might actually help or bless someone.

Generosity should mark us as Christ's followers. It comes only as God does something way down deep in our hearts. When he transforms us, that's is how we'll live.

ILLUSTRATION: A youth group got a passion to fight AIDS in Africa. To date, they have collected 7 million pennies.

CONCLUSION

Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can. That's stewardship of the nine-tenths in a nutshell.

As followers of Christ, we must find a right relationship to money and to things. May you find what it means to be stewards of all that God may be giving to you personally AND to us corporately (as a church and in our spheres of influence). What we do with our things + our money will say something to the world about the Lord whose name we bear.

END OF SERMON

Now let me pull together all the questions I have asked throughout the sermon.

Pick one. . .write it down. . .have some serious dialogue with God this week:

- What does my checkbook + my calendar say about my priorities?
- Am I focused more on my own fears than I am on God's ability to take care of me?
- Has "enough" become too much in some areas?

- Do my possessions own me?
- How is God at work in me when it comes to money?
- In what areas could I be more generous?

CLOSING

You can never outgive God. You'll never be able to give back to God as much as He has given you. But give Him your heart, and I assure you the whole issue of how to deal with money (whether the 1/10 or the 9/10) will fall into place.

This is how it works: "God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. . .and He will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness." [II Corinthians 9:8,10] ***Praise be to God!***