

Ministry from the Heart

1 Timothy 6:17-19

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As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, *so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*

Why do we do the things we do?

The answers to this question are often simply and quite revealing. Possible answers range from:

I was told to do something.

I was expected to do something.

I have always done something.

I was afraid not to do something.

or

What else could I do?

Let's face it; much of life is really out of our control. We live with a long list of expectations about how we live our lives. From the first thing in the morning, until we lay our heads down at night, we spend most of our time doing what other people expect us to do! We don't do it for ourselves, we do it for others, and we even do things for our pets, whether we like it or not. There is occasional newspaper article about the mother who goes "On Strike" and refuses to play the game any longer.

When I change the oil in my truck, I use Valvoline, not because I have studied the different types of oil, but because my Dad used Valvoline. Most of what we do, we do because we have been conditioned by family, school and church to act and react in certain ways.

Why do we give to the church? Oh, that's easy, to shut the preacher up! After all that is all he ever talks about! It becomes a handy reason, accepted by most people, for not attending church. After all, who wants to hear about money all the time?

Many people give out of a sense of duty and commitment. God has been good to us, so we will return a portion, a small portion, back to Him.

If we give, God will protect us and watch over us. Call it "Divine Insurance." We expect a certainly level of protection and even blessing from our giving.

We give because our parents gave. We were taught to honor God with the first fruits of our labor. We simply continue the tradition, even though we might not fully understand the principles behind giving.

Some give out of fear. We are afraid that when we stand before God in judgment (remember that idea) that it will at least go better for us if we have given a little.

Unfortunately, most Christians are living far below the level of God's blessing in their lives. Too many see it as a necessary responsibility that we hope others will meet. For too many our giving to the church is another bill to be paid, instead of an expression of gratitude.

The Apostle Paul is writing to the young preacher, Timothy and giving him direction for his ministry. Paul tells Timothy to encourage people to follow correct doctrine, "*...so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*"

In other words, the notion that material wealth can bring authentic living is an illusion. Material wealth can do a lot of things and provide what folks call "creature comforts," - but it does not have the ability to provide inner peace and fulfillment. Wealth can deliver things that make us comfortable, but it cannot deliver contentment.

The determining factor is not the amount of money we have. The determining factor to our happiness and well being is the attitude we have about what we do possess.

We are Created to Be Generous; but Tempted to Hoard

God created us with the willingness to give—to God and to others. This design is part of our makeup; we actually have the *need* to be generous. Intuitively, we know this. Yet there are two voices that “war” against our God-given impulse toward generosity, and another “voice” tempting us to keep or hoard what we have.

The voice of fear.

The fear of the unknown, along with a misplaced idea about the true source of our security, often keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. We hold onto as much as possible, thinking that our security is in things.

I have even seen churches that would not spend any money for programs or missions, because they thought the roof or the air conditioner might go out someday. Well, guess what they are right, but we should never allow this excuse from keeping us from being in ministry to our community and world. While our ultimate security comes from God, our temporal security comes from relationships with others.

The voice of self-gratification.

Our culture tells us that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, *If I give, there won't be enough left for me.*

I am amazed at the stories of couponing people and the amount of stuff they buy because it is free. Remember, free isn't always free!

To “take hold of the life that really is life” we must change our allegiance.

When we give our lives to Christ, invite him to be Lord, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to dissipate and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others. Although we still may wrestle with the “voices” from time to time, we are able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in Christ. And the more we grow in Christ, realizing that our lives belong to him, the more generous we become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth.

Biblical Guidelines for Giving

From the early days of the Old Testament, God’s people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best of what they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the *first fruits* or the *tithe*, and it equaled one-tenth of one’s flocks or crops or income. Abraham was the first to give a tithe or tenth.

Giving a Tithe

As Christians who live under the new covenant, we are not bound by the Law of Moses; we look to it as a guide. Yet most Christians agree that the tithe is a good guideline for our lives, and one that is pleasing to God. That is a graphic and a somewhat humorous portrayal of what we know can happen in many of our lives. The pressures and distractions begin to consume us. By the time we get around to God, there is not much left. Too many Christians end up tipping instead of tithing.

Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you cannot tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are, and God will help you make the adjustments necessary for you to become more and more generous.

Giving beyond the tithe.

Tithing is a floor, not a ceiling. God calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We should strive to set aside an additional percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects, schools, church building funds, and other nonprofit organizations.

Through Giving, Our Hearts Are Changed

When we are generous—to God and to our families, friends, neighbors, and others who are in need—our hearts are filled with joy. They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become even more generous.

Many Christians have it wrong. They say that if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that is not how it works. We do not give to God *so that* we can get something in return. The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back to us. Of course, there is no guarantee that if you tithe you will never lose your job or never have other bad things happen to you. Nevertheless, when we give generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.

Adam Hamilton told the story of John D. Rockefeller, Sr. in the epilogue of his little book, Enough. He said that Rockefeller had made his first million by the age of 33, but by the age of 53 he had become seriously ill. He could not digest his food, his hair was falling out; he was depressed and diagnosed with one year to live. He decided at that point to make that year count. He started giving away the stuff that he once obsessed over amassing. He built hospitals, contributed generously to his church, gave millions to missions, and helped build universities. His life was transformed by generosity and that one year stretched into 45 years, before his death at the age of 98. **Hamilton concluded, “Rockefeller’s life was saved when he stopped focusing on himself and his acquiring and began to focus on others and giving away.”**

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. John 10:10

Why do we give? Because we have received God’s gift of love into our hearts and we can do no less than live fully for Him!

In the Name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen!

Resources:

Hamilton, Adam., Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity. Abingdon Press, 2009

Please know this is not a word for word manuscript of the preaching event. This is background material and primary thoughts that may or may not be used during the sermon delivery.