

MOVING TO THE CORE

Part 7

Perhaps some of you are acquainted with the story of John G. Wendel and his sisters. They stand out as some of the most miserly people of all time. Although they had received a huge inheritance from their parents, they spent very little of it and did all they could to keep their wealth for themselves.

John was able to influence five of his six sisters never to marry, and they lived in the same house in New York City for 50 years. When the last sister died in 1931, her estate was valued at more than \$100 million. Her only dress was one that she had made herself, and she had worn it for 25 years.

The Wendels had such a compulsion to hold on to their possessions that they lived like paupers.

On the other end of the spectrum, I am thinking of an employee that asked his boss for a raise. He told his employer that several companies were after him. When asked which ones, he replied, "There's the electric company, the phone company and the gas company."

Seriously, once again I am going to talk to you about "Moving To The Core". This morning we will look at the issue of money.

THE CORE GIVES

I want to expand on that thought. Those who make up the core of the church of Jesus Christ have the same desires and concerns as everyone else. They have bills to pay, kids in school, mortgages, and the like. They get calls from telemarketers, appeals from "Feed the children", and have little girls come to door selling cookies just like the rest of us. They only have so much money and it can only go so far. However, these people give and give and give. In fact, they enjoy giving.

Giving is a touchy subject with many Christians. However I have found to my joy that my best givers though the years have been the ones who have encouraged me the most to talk about giving. At the same time, those who give little if anything to the church are the ones who complain the loudest when the subject of money is brought up. I have seen it happen more than once.

I find that interesting. Don't you?

Matthew 6:21 declares from the lips of Jesus, "**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**" The heart and the treasure of the core is not money; it is something higher, something eternal, something more.

THE BIBLE HAS MUCH TO SAY ABOUT FINANCES

I read somewhere that there are 2,350 passages in the Bible dealing with money and material possessions – more than on any other subject.

Let me give you some examples.

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said, "**No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot**

serve both God and Money.” The point is, eventually each and every one of us has to make a decision as to which god we will serve and love – the One True God, or the god called money.

Proverbs 3:9-10, **“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”**

3 John 2 (*Strong’s Translation*), **“My beloved children it is my desire above everything else that you prosper in life, succeed in business, enjoy good health and be diligent about prospering your soul.”**

Isaiah 48:17, (*New King James Version*) **“Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.’”**

Matthew 23:23, **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”**

I could go on to read many of the Proverbs, the Psalms, as well as the parables of Jesus. I could draw from Genesis as well as Revelation. I could take my text from the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Jesus, or the Apostle Paul. Each one talks about personal finance, business ethics, tithing, or other financial issues. In short, you are never far from some passage that deals with money anywhere you go in the Bible.

LET ME NOW GIVE YOU SOME INTERESTING FACTS CONCERNING GIVING

3 percent of church people give 25% of the income of the church
 10 percent of church people give 25% of the income of the church
 20 percent of church people give 25% of the income of the church
 67 percent of church people give 25% of the income of the church (Half of this 67% actually give nothing to the church)

- Giving by Christians to all charities – including the church -- is 2.7% of their income. Giving by all Americans is 1.7% of their income.
- Americans spend \$40 billion a year on leisure travel, \$32 billion on diet programs, \$5.2 billion on dog and cat food, about \$4 billion on craft items, while Protestants give \$2 billion a year to missions per year. (*National & International Religion Report*, February 6, 1995 and *Lifelines*, July/August 1990.)
- According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, eight of ten Americans who died in 1990 with estates worth at least half a million dollars did not leave a penny to charity. (*Servant*, January, 1994)
- Talk-show host Dave Ramsey once spoke about how different America would be if all the Christians tithed. He said: "There would be no more welfare in North America. In 90 days there would be no existing church or hospital debts. In the next 90 days, the entire world could be evangelized. There would be prayer in schools, because Christians would buy all the schools!"

I like the story of one reluctant giver. As he prepared to put his \$10 bill in the offering plate, he was overheard saying to himself, "I think I can give this and not feel it." The usher whispered to him, "Why don't you give \$20n and feel it?"

The truth of the matter is, we show how much we care by how much we give.

HAVING SAID THAT, I NOW WANT TO DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE SO-CALLED FOUR LAWS OF THE HARVEST

Please turn in your Bibles to Galatians 6:7-10. Let's read: **"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."**

THE FIRST LAW OF THE HARVEST IS, "A MAN REAPS WHAT HE SOWS."

This is simple.

- If you want a harvest of wheat, what kinds of seeds would you sow?
- If you want oats?
- If you want corn?
- Hey, we are on a roll here. One more. If you want to have a crop of watermelons, what should you plant? Watermelon seeds. You don't plant the whole watermelon, you plant the seed.

I know that we have a number of farmers that attend here. We also have quite a few people who enjoy gardening. Anyone who has had any experience whatsoever with seeds will be able to tell you -- as the law of the harvest says -- a man reaps that which he sows, or a woman reaps that which she sows, a teenagers reaps that which he or she sows.

In the book of Genesis, in the very first chapter, in verses 11-13, we read, **"Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.' And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it ACCORDING TO THEIR KINDS. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the third day."**

On the third day of creation, God established a law that says **"We reap what we sow"**.

How long can we depend on this law to be in effect? Notice Genesis 8:22, **"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."** So, as long as the earth stands, you can count on this. **"We reap what we sow."**

There is a spiritual application to this law. Paul in Galatians 6:8 goes on to say, **"The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."**

The point is, this law applies to everything:

- **IT APPLIES TO FRIENDS.** The Bible in Proverbs 18:24 (*King James Version*) notes that **“A man [that hath] friends must shew himself friendly.”** If you want friends, be kind, helpful, considerate, attentive. And after awhile, you reap a harvest of friends. And if you want enemies, be unkind, curt, rude, crude, and after awhile, you reap a harvest of enemies. Someone has said "be kind to your enemies, after all you made them". There may be more truth to that than we'd like to admit.
- **IT APPLIES TO MERCY.** For in Matthew 5:7 Jesus said, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”** If you want mercy, you must sow the seeds of mercy.
- **THEN THE LAW APPLIES TO CASTING JUDGMENT.** Notice Matthew 7:2, **“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

Why? Because, **“We reap what we sow.”**

Can you imagine what the world would be like without this law? The economy and business would be in shambles. For instance, let's say that someone decided to plant a field of wheat. He buys all of the equipment, he buys the necessary seed, he waits until the season is right for planting wheat and then he goes out and sows 1,000 acres. Imagine the disappointment and chaos if a few weeks later, alfalfa came up instead. What confusion there would be.

Does this law apply to giving? What does the Bible say? Look with me at Luke 6:38, **“Give, and it will be given to you.”**

Malachi 3: 10 could be added here, **“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’”**

I like John Bunyan's little poem: “There was a man, some called him mad; The more he gave, the more he had.” That truly seems to be what the Bible is saying to us this morning.

I have purposefully tried to keep this point very plain and simple. I have provided very little commentary. I just wanted to let the Bible speak for itself. In doing so, I think you can see that the first law of the harvest even applies to money.

Therefore is it too much of a stretch to say,

- If you want to reap dollar bills then you should sow dollar bills.
- If you want to reap ten dollar bills, you should sow ten dollar bills.
- If you want to reap twenty dollar bills, you should sow twenty dollar bills.
- Let's try one more time. If you want to reap one hundred dollar bills, you should sow one hundred dollar bills.

Why? Because, **“We reap what we sow”**

THE SECOND LAW OF THE HARVEST IS, WE REAP MORE THAN WE SOW.

In the book of Matthew 13:8, Jesus says it like this, **“...Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”**

This is huge.

- You sow thirty bushels of grain and you get back thirty **TIMES** (not 30 percent) that amount.
- You sow sixty bushels of grain and you get back sixty **TIMES** that amount.
- You sow one hundred bushels of grain and you get back one hundred **TIMES** that amount.

I don't know many banks that are paying interest like that. But Jesus said, "You'll get it back with increase".

At the age of fourteen, Alexander Kerr was converted to Christ under the ministry of Evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Some years later, in 1902, Mr. Kerr read the story of Jacob and of his vow found in Genesis 28:22 which says, "...and of all that you give me, I will give you a **tenth.**" The Scriptures record that twenty years later, Jacob returned to his home with great numbers of servants and cattle. He had become one of the richest men in the East as a result of keeping his covenant of tithing.

Moved by the account, Alexander Kerr made a covenant himself to tithe as had Jacob before him. At that time, Kerr had a mortgage on his house, owed many obligations, and was burdened with a number of worries. However, he was determined to prove God as Jacob had done.

Mr. Kerr often remarked that if modern day skeptics wanted proof that there is a God, that the Bible is His Holy Word, and that its promises are true, all they needed to do is tithe for one year and God would prove to them, without a doubt, that He is, ". . . **the same yesterday, today, and forever..**" (Hebrews 13:8).

Within three months of beginning to tithe, unexpected and unforeseen blessings started coming his way. With very little money on hand, Kerr organized the firm known as the Kerr Glass Manufacturing Company. It became one of the largest firms selling fruit jars in the United States. His company was headquartered in San Francisco.

Mr. Kerr had put practically every cent he had into his fruit jar enterprise, and then came the 1906 earthquake and fire! His friends came to him and said, "Kerr, you are a ruined man." He replied, "I don't believe it; if I am, then the Bible is not true; I know God will not go back on His promises."

He wired to San Francisco, and received the following reply, "Your factory is in the heart of the fire and undoubtedly is destroyed. The heat is so intense we will be unable to find out anything for some days."

About a week after the earthquake and fire, a second telegram arrived saying, "Everything for a mile and a half on all sides of the factory burned; but your factory is miraculously saved."

Mr. Kerr immediately boarded a train for San Francisco. The factory was a two-story wooden building containing the huge tanks where the glass was melted. The tanks were kept at a temperature of 2500 degrees. Oil was used for fuel. The building was probably the most flammable in San Francisco!

The fire had raged on all sides of the factory, creeping up to the wooden fence surrounding the building and even scorching it; then the flames and fire leaped around and over and beyond the building, burning everything in its path. However, not even the wooden fence was burned, nor the building, and not a single glass jar was cracked by either the earthquake or the fire.

In 1912 Mr. Kerr wrote his first leaflet on the subject of tithing entitled, *God's Cure for Poverty*. This was followed by another tract entitled, *God's Loving Money Rule For Your Financial Prosperity*. Every case of fruit jars that left the factory contained one of these leaflets. From

1912 to the time of his death on February 9, 1924, he had freely distributed more than five million of these leaflets.

Let me return to two verses that I shared a moment ago. Again Luke 6:38 promises, **“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”**

Malachi 3:10 then adds, **““Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.””**

As Mr. Kerr found out, we reap more than we sow.

Oh, pastor, I thought you just gave because you enjoyed giving. Well I do enjoy giving; giving excites me. I have found that it truly is more blessed to give than it is to receive. However, imagine asking a farmer who is out in his fields:

- "What are you doing?"
- He says, "I'm sowing".
- "Oh, well, what are you sowing?"
- "I'm sowing wheat".
- "Hmmm, what do you expect to get out of this?"
- "Nothing, I just enjoy sowing".

That is one seriously dumb farmer! No farmer sows just for the fun of sowing. Every farmer sows with an eye for the harvest. He expects to get something back and he expects to get back more than he has sown.

Every so often someone asks me if I expect to get a return from my giving to the Lord. My answer is “By all means, yes.” I not only expect it, I have been getting a return for years now. As you know, when I was growing up, I was so poor, I couldn’t pay attention. In spite of this, I was the first Jackson that I know of that paid a tithe unto the Lord. Someone might have beat me to the punch, but I would be truly surprised.

- Is it therefore a coincidence that I was also the first male Jackson to graduate from high school?
- I was the first to graduate from college.
- I was the first in my family to own a home.
- To buy a new car.
- To buy a new suit.

I even owe the fact that I married Marilyn, in part to tithing. I remember sitting on the bank of the Houston Ship Channel, outside of Houston, Texas, years ago with Marilyn. We were engaged to be married at the time and we were talking about our future lives together. It was then that my lady popped the question. No, not that one. She asked me if I intended to tithe for the rest of my life. I was already a tither, but I became one in earnest right then and there. For Marilyn let me know that if I loved money more than I loved God, she would not marry me. Tithing was that important to her.

It is from that background that I can truthfully say the second law of the harvest works. I have

received back much more than I have ever given to the Lord.

THE THIRD LAW OF THE HARVEST IS, WE REAP AFTER WE SOW.

Let me make a very important point now. We have to sow **BEFORE** we reap. This is one of the hardest lessons for us to learn. Many times we want to reap first, and then sow.

I have had many Christians come to me down through the years and want to use me as a point man with God. They will tell me, "Pastor, I just want you to know that I have entered the Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes, and if Ed McMann shows up at my door with \$8 million dollars, the first 10% of the money will go to the church. They want to first reap, and then give.

Back to the farmer, just picture the farmer that goes out to his field and says:

- "Oh, field... give me a harvest and I will sow to you". That's crazy!
- No, the field says, "Mr. Farmer, I can't do that. God made a law that says 'you must sow first' - if you will sow then I will give you a harvest".
- The farmer says, "Oh, field ... you do not understand. I am very poor. I cannot afford to sow. But if you will give me a harvest, then I will have and then I will sow."
- And the field says, "Mr. Farmer, you may be very poor, but if you don't sow, you're going to be poorer yet". It's as simple as that!

I've heard Christians say, "Well if I had it to give, I would give". God is saying, "If you would give, you would have".

It's not what you'd give with a million,
if riches should err be your lot.
It's what you're doing at the minute,
with the dollar and a quarter you've got.

Jesus said it this way, Luke 16:10, "**Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much....**"

I enjoy using illustrations from nature when I counsel people in my office. One of my oft-used analogies concerns this principle of sowing and later reaping. Some seeds bear fruit in a very short time, others may take years.

- If you're raising mushrooms, for instance, you can have a crop in but a few hours.
- If you're raising radishes, you can have a crop in a few days.
- If you're raising potatoes, you can have a crop in a few weeks.
- If you're raising winter wheat, it takes a few months to realize a harvest.
- But if you're raising Delicious Apples, it may actually take several years.

In like fashion, you never know when the harvest of return will come from God, you just know that it will come sooner or later – but always after you sow.

Galatians 6:9 adds from the *New Living Translation*, "**So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME.**"

Sow now, reap later.

LAW NUMBER FOUR IS, IT MATTERS WHERE WE SOW.

Always sow in good soil. Jesus in His Parable of the Soils shows us that it is the good soil that produces the 30, 60, or 100 fold harvest.

The Bible is very clear in where we should sow. Notice Malachi 3:10 again, **“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.”** I want to break this down for you. Where's the storehouse? It is commonly held that the storehouse is the local church today. It is the place that is called “the Lord’s house.” It is the place where our families get a good portion of their spiritual food.

- Some say, "Well, I send my tithe to a television preacher or radio preacher". Think with me here. My all time favorite place to eat is Perry’s Fish House in South Burlington, Vermont. I will never forget eating there. Having said that, what would happen were I to go to a real nice eating place in Madison, order a great big steak, enjoy it to the fullest, and then when it comes time to pay, go over to the cashier and say, "I've really enjoyed being in your establishment. The food is excellent. The service is certainly above average and the atmosphere here is very enjoyable. But I really like Perry’s Fish House in South Burlington, Vermont and I would like to send my check there, if you don’t mind. How many of you think the cashier would mind? In fact, I would more than likely pay the bill or else spend the rest of the night sleeping on a steel cot.

No, the rules are, we pay where we eat; we tithe where we worship.

- Some people say well, "I send my tithe to missions". I love missions. I give to missions. However, if everybody did that, pretty soon there wouldn't be a local church and the missionaries would have to leave the field due to a lack a support base. Giving to missions isn't tithing, it is giving an offering.

While here, let me be so bold as to say:

- The Bible doesn't tell you to use the tithe to purchase Christian tapes and books. That is purchasing, not tithing.
- The Bible doesn't tell you to use the tithe to pay for your Bible school tuition and fees. That is payment, not tithing.
- The Bible doesn't tell you to divide the tithe into portions and give two percent to your local church, three percent to your favorite evangelist, two percent to the Salvation Army, and three percent to buy groceries for poor sister Mary. That is not tithing, it is proportioning.

You are to bring the whole tithe – the entire tithe -- into the storehouse. Check me out in Scripture. You will see that I am right.

Don't get me wrong. I want you to give in offerings. I want you to support worthy ministries outside of this assembly. Give to missions. Give to Christian schools and colleges. Great!

However, do keep this in mind:

- Where are you being fed God's Word?
- Where do you worship?
- Where do you fellowship with other believers?
- Where do you receive help and Godly counsel?

- Where do your children receive much of their spiritual nurture?
- Who visits you in the hospital?
- Who will preach your funeral?
- Where do you turn in a time of need?

The answers are obvious. This is your local church and this is where your **TITHE** belongs. In fact, I love to tell people, if you consider all of the services that your local church provides, you have to conclude that you get by very cheaply. This place is the greatest bargain in town. It is good soil!

THERE ARE THREE REASONS WHY SOME DO NOT TITHE

1. The first is that they have never been taught to tithe. It takes courage today to speak the truth about money because it is such a god to so many people. I know that I hate to speak on the subject. I would rather not have to deal with the stuff that follows the sermon.
2. The second reason people do not tithe is that they misunderstand the place of tithing in the Bible. Some do not think it is for today, however, an unbiased study of the Word of God – both Old and New Testaments – will remove the confusion. “Well, pastor, tithing is a part of the Old Testament Law.” Really? My understanding of Scripture is that tithing predates the Law by hundreds of years. Abraham, for instance, was a tither.
3. The third reason people don't tithe is simply because they refuse to do so. Frank Hubbard has said, "When a fellow says, 'It ain't the money, but the principle of the thing,' it's the money." He is right. Money talks. It says a lot about our attitudes toward God. Do you really believe you are glorifying God by not tithing?

Listen to Malachi 3:8-9, “**Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, “How do we rob you?” ‘In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me.”**

Leviticus 27:30 adds, “**A tithe** (the word tithe means tenth) **of everything... BELONGS to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.**” It doesn't say the tithe will become the Lord's when you put it in the offering. No, it is already His. The tithe belongs to the Lord - all of it belongs to Him whether we put it in or not. And if we don't put it in, then we are guilty of robbing Him.

Are you aware of the fact that money can actually be hazardous to your health? This is true. Two medical researchers at the University of Louisville have found that “13%” of the coins and 42% of the paper money carry disease-producing organisms.” Small denomination coins and bills are more dangerous because of their rapid turnover. Get rid of that filthy stuff -- put it in the offering plate. Seriously, I dare say that money can also be hazardous to your health if you withhold that which belongs to the Lord.

I WANT TO CONCLUDE this message with three challenges:

- If you aren't presently tithing, start today.
- If you are a sporadic tither, become faithful.
- If you are afraid to tithe, step out in faith. Prove God.

Why not let the laws of the harvest work for you?