

# It's about purpose



It's about purpose – in the use of our time, our talents and our treasure. Joyful generosity is essential to a full and healthy Christian life.

As followers of Christ, we are asked to be part of God's world, not to stand apart from it. Our calling is that of stewards. As we share and as we serve, our prayer is that others will see in us the generous love of God and be drawn to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.



**Everence**

## Living free

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you!"

– *Hebrews 13:5*

### Read

Hebrews 13:1-6

### Reflect

I was contented – I really was – until I was given a membership to one of those mega-warehouse retail stores a couple of years ago. Now at least once a week, I wander up and down the aisles to see what new things I don't have, don't really need, but could instantly fall in love with. Specialty foods. Furniture. Clothes. Electronic gadgetry. Books. Garden stuff. And caskets. That's right. I just heard that I could go to my mega-store, select a casket, and have it shipped to the mortuary of my choice within 48 hours. Talk about convenience. Talk about value.

Talk about perspective. When I read about the caskets, it reminded me of just how brief our time on earth is and that this is only our temporary residence. As someone once said, "You've never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer."

Pastor Rick Warren, in *The Purpose Driven Life*, writes, "You will not be in heaven two seconds before you cry out, 'Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary? What was I thinking? Why did I waste so much time, energy, and concern on what wasn't going to last?'"

There are many things to desire in life, but there is only one true source of contentment. When we have Jesus, we have everything we need.

### Pray

Lord, give me the heart of Paul, who learned to be content whatever his circumstances, whether in plenty or in need. Teach me that your presence in my life is everything I could ever need and that I can do everything through you who gives me strength. Amen.

### Act

Make a list of all the things you are discontented with in your life right now and begin to thank God for them one by one. Ask God to show you just how blessed you are in Jesus Christ.

– *Perry Engle*

## Kingdom focused

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

– 1 Corinthians 15:58

### Read

1 Corinthians 15:50 – 16:4

### Reflect

In 1997, our family moved to Montgomeryville, Pa., to start a new church. Over the next months and years, I noticed many of the folks who made their way into our congregation had the idea that the church is more interested in people's wallets than anything else. So I made it a point to confront the stereotype head-on by reminding the congregation that we were the beneficiaries of the generosity and faithfulness of other Christians throughout our region and nation. Gifts through church extension ministries and to various church-planting efforts made it possible for us to start our church.

It was unlikely that people from these other congregations would worship with us or benefit from our new ministry. Yet, because our brothers and sisters were committed fully to the work of the Lord, they gave to change the lives of people they would never meet.

This Christ-honoring, selfless, kingdom-focused perspective on giving had an eternal impact on our fledgling congregation. And it is exactly the kind of giving Paul speaks about in his letter to the Corinthians. As we give of ourselves, our time, and our money to the work of the Lord, we can rest in the promise that it will not be in vain.

### Pray

Dear Jesus, I lift up to you the men and women, children and teens whose lives will be touched today through the ministries that my gifts, and the gifts of others in my congregation, are supporting. It is a wonderful thing to be your steward and I commit myself to consistent, generous, joyful giving. Amen.

### Act

Browse through your checkbook asking these questions: What would someone who did not know me believe I valued most based on my expenditures? Would God's work in the local church and the world show up as a top value, or would there be little evidence of regular, proportional and generous giving?

– Glenn Pfeiffer

## Money at the root

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.

– *1 Timothy 6:10*

### Read

1 Timothy 6:6-10

### Reflect

An ambitious businessman who survived the 2001 World Trade Center disaster said, “I have now learned to hold all things loosely.” Hopefully it won’t take a tragedy such as this for the rest of us to learn the biblical principle of holding things loosely.

In this letter, Paul warns the young pastor Timothy against false teachings that were prominent in the church at Ephesus and specifically the wrong-headed notion that godliness leads to financial wealth. “No,” Paul wrote, “It is godliness with contentment that leads to great gain” (verse 6). The word “content” in Greek refers to a perfect condition in life. In II Corinthians 9:8, the same word describes a sufficiency in the necessities of life. Contentment is one of the greatest assets in life.

Real contentment comes when we switch our service from things, to God only. Paul stresses that the love of money is a starting place of all evils. Let me emphasize: Money is neither good nor bad, but the love of it may lead to all kinds of evil. Being entrusted with financial wealth brings great responsibility, and we can exercise that responsibility for both good and for evil. The Jewish rabbis have a saying: “Who is rich? He who is contented with his lot.”

### Pray

Heavenly Father, today I ask for the gift of contentment. Set me free from the love of money so I can love you more fully. Replace my selfishness with a spirit of gratitude, and teach me to hold onto the things of this world loosely. Amen.

### Act

Take out a piece of paper and list the things of this world that you can let go of now. Tuck the list into the back of this booklet. Check back at the end of the month to see if you have begun to let go of the items on your list.

– *Kathlee Leadley*

## Sacrifice of firstfruits

And the Lord has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands.

– *Deuteronomy 26:18*

### Read

Deuteronomy 26:1-4, 9-19

### Reflect

*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* defines firstfruits as “the sacrifice offered by the Hebrews for the redemption of the annual crop.” Early Semitic people believed that because God created everything, everything belonged to God. They also realized they needed grains, vegetables, fruit and flesh of animals as food to sustain life.

It was determined, then, that some kind of redemption needed to take place that would enable them to make use of what belonged to God. The act of redemption took the form of a sacrifice of the first and best of their harvest or of their livestock. The rest was available for sustaining life among the clan.

In I Corinthians 15:20, Paul wrote, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Through his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus became the means by which humankind is redeemed – the sacrifice that enables us to be in an intimate relationship with the God of all Creation, our Heavenly Father.

As the people of God, are we giving back to God our firstfruits? Are we willing to order our lives so that God receives the first and best from us?

### Pray

Father of us all, you have taught us about generosity that leads to abundance and withholding that comes to poverty. Open our eyes and hearts that we may discern the blessings that accompany giving what belongs to you. May we give joyously of what you entrust to us. Amen.

### Act

Spend a few minutes thinking about what your spending indicates about your priorities. What percentage of your income are you actually giving to your church and beyond? Do these reflect a firstfruits attitude toward giving?

– *Mike Anderson*

## The motive

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.

– *II Corinthians 8:13-14*

### Read

II Corinthians 8:1-15

### Reflect

In the midst of severe affliction and extreme poverty, the Macedonian church had a rich generosity. They gave based on their relationship with God. Their giving was not based in what they had or did not have financially, but in their commitment to what they discerned God had for them to do.

The Macedonians gave beyond their ability because they saw their giving as a “privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.”

When I am going through tough times and feel financially strapped, I’m not usually “welled up in rich generosity.” Yet there is much ministry to be done in our day and most requires financial support. What would help us to have the same passion for giving that the Macedonians had?

Christ’s amazing sacrifice is the greatest example of God’s generosity to us. The Macedonians were overflowing with generosity as they realized the grace of generosity from God himself.

### Pray

Most gracious and generous Father, I give you thanks for your generosity to me. May I be able to see the rich privilege I have in sharing in the work of ministry through my financial generosity. My desire is to see financial equality take place in this world as your church faithfully shares with each other. Direct me and help me to do my part. Amen.

### Act

Make a list of all the ministries in which your local congregation is involved. While looking at the list, take time to rejoice in all the ministries in which you are privileged to be sharing. Reflect on the generosity of God, especially the gift of his Son. Allow the generosity of God to become the generosity of your heart and actions.

– *Isaac Flagg*

## It's about purpose

"We are rich only through what we give, and poor only through what we refuse to give and keep."

– Anne Swetchine (1782-1857), Russian-French writer

### Coming together

15 minutes

1. Talk about one dream from your childhood that has become a reality in your life today.
2. Share any hopes or dreams you have had as an adult that have disappointed you once they were realized.
3. What has God asked you to do that, while costly, was also incredibly fulfilling?

### Learning together

40 minutes

#### *Read Scripture and discuss*

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 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." (Matthew 6:19-24)

"The only thing which a man can take out of this world into the world beyond is himself; and the finer self he brings, the greater will be his treasure in heaven."

– William Barclay

1. Jesus talks about storing up treasures that can be destroyed. What are some modern examples of wealth and treasure that can deteriorate in value by decay, destruction or theft?
2. How is Jesus' concern about deteriorating value relevant in a time of IRAs, stocks, houses, cars and boats?
3. In verse 20, Jesus talks about storing up treasure in heaven. How is this accomplished?
4. How do we determine what we truly treasure?
5. Jesus identifies our heart (motives, drive, greatest desire) as the source of whatever we treasure. How do we foster a heart that treasures eternal things more than the things of this world?
6. What does proper spiritual vision do for us?
7. Jesus finishes this section by talking about two masters. What happens when we try to live with divided loyalty, multiple treasures?

"For where your treasure is there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

### Sharing together

10 minutes

In I Timothy 6:10, Paul says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. What can you do to bring your heart more in line with kingdom values?

### Praying together

10 minutes

Take a few moments in light of the study and give everyone a chance to share what's happening in their spiritual lives and what God has been saying to them. Then ask each other, "How can we help you this week in prayer?"

After sharing, pray together. If someone is uncomfortable praying out loud, give him/her the opportunity to say a one-sentence prayer or to simply pray in silence. Also, don't forget to pray for any specific items mentioned and other needs you are aware of within the group.

Record the praises and concerns mentioned within your small group. This will help you remember the other people in your group throughout the week during your devotion times.

Name	Praise or concern



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