

## Define the Relationship

### Uncomfortable, but...

Frankton – 2/22/15

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 29. 10b-14,16-18 David's prayer

Proposition: We give to God out of love for God in return for his love for us.

Today we are going to address a topic that is often uncomfortable for both pastors and the people of many churches. We are going to address the topic of our giving back to God. Jesus discussed our relationship with our money and possessions more than he talked about any other topic except the kingdom of heaven. This is not a fund raising campaign. Nor is this a plea for more money. It is simply going to be an honest look at the issue of giving back to God from a passage in 1 Chronicles which talks about how David and the people provided the resources for building the Temple of God. As we look at this passage together we will be asking and answering three questions: [SLIDE] 1) Why do we give? 2) How do we give? and 3) what should we give? We will not be exhaustive in our answers to these questions but will primarily stick to this passage and see what it has to say to us regarding these things.

In today's lesson we learn that giving to God is a sign of loyalty and obedience and also love for God. David writes: [SLIDE] *O Lord...make your people always want to obey you. See to it that their love for you never changes.* [29:18]. In Genesis, God told us to be good stewards of, to take care of, this earth and all he gave us. So when we are being a good steward we are obeying God. Giving back to God is one piece of evidence that shows that our hearts are truly loyal and obedient to God. This is the case because our finances are usually one of the last areas that we are willing to turn over to God. We are very willing to hand over to God all the rough spots in our lives, but not quite as willing to hand over our finances. A pastor I know once said, "If God has their checkbook, you know he has their heart." So, when one becomes a good steward that's a good indicator of their devotion to God. Let's look at this passage together.

So let's start with the most basic of questions: [SLIDE] *Why should we give?* This is a very good question to start with as it is the basis for understanding our giving to God. Many people would say that they have worked very hard to earn their money, so why should they turn around and give it away to God. They worked for it. They earned it. It belongs to them. But as we begin to delve into the passage at hand we quickly learn that this simply isn't true. We quickly find that according to David everything belongs to God. Early in our passage, David prays: [SLIDE] *everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord...* [11] This exposes a fundamental flaw in the world view of most people including many Christians. This passage, as well as others, show us that our possessions, our money, our time, our talents, our abilities, and our entire life really belong to God and not to us. And since it doesn't belong to us in the first place we have no right to hoard it for ourselves.

Not only does God own all things, but also everything we have comes to us as a gift from God. David says as much in verse 14: [SLIDE] *Everything we have has come from you....* [14] When you understand this truth you realize that when you give you are not giving God what belongs to you, but you are giving back to God what already belongs to him. For David giving back to God was a matter of praise and worship: [SLIDE] *O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious*

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*name!* [13] We are often guilty of viewing the singing part of the worship service as the worship. But the giving and collecting of the offering are every bit as much acts of worship as is singing praise to God. In fact, if we sing our praise to God, but do not back that up with giving to God, then our songs of praise ring empty.

One last reason why we should give back to God what is already his. And it's pretty simple: without our giving back, the work of God's ministry can't continue. If we don't give back to God, God's ministries of this church does can't continue. If we don't give back to God, the food pantry shelves are a little barer and a child goes a little hungrier. If we don't give back to God, less homes down in Red Bird Mission are worked on, and another family suffers. If we don't give back to God, the UM Children's Home in Lebanon has to shrink its ministry, and a child can't get the help she needs. If we don't give back to God, there's one less book bought for the children of our own missionary, Lillie Knotts, ministers to in the Dominican Republic, and yet another child is left behind. Without our giving back to God, the ministries of God's church shrink, and we end up not *Building God's Community*.

That's enough about why we should give. So the next questions is: [SLIDE] **How** should we give? This questions deals with what manner we should give back to God. Did you know that it is not enough to simply give back to God? Did you know that you can give back to God, but do it in the wrong way? It is important that when we give back to God we do it for the right reason and in the right way.

The first right way is that we are to give [SLIDE] generously. We can give back to God generously because God has given generously to us. Let's go back to the scripture and ask how generous David and the Israelites were in their giving. Consider these numbers from verses 7-8. According to this scripture, David personally gave tons of gold and tons of silver (he was a king). When the people saw how generous David gave, they gave more tons of gold, more tons of silver, more tons of bronze, and more tons of iron. That is some very generous giving. But before you get overwhelmed remember that that were able to generously give to God because God had given generously to them. The Bible tells us that we should give to God in proportion to how we have been blessed. This is the principle of tithing. This is the practice of giving back to God 10% of what God has given us. We give back to God generously as he has blessed us.

It is one thing to give generously, but it is another to give [SLIDE] **willingly**. So the second way to give back to God is willingly. Would you be able to give as generously as the people of Israel did and do so willingly or would you have to be coerced? If you check you history books, there are many examples all throughout history of kings collecting money from the people by force. Today, we can think of the US government collecting our taxes. Taxes are not something you can opt out of. You must pay – or face the consequences. (Not saying there is anything wrong with taxes, they serve a great purpose.) Let's look at it another way. For any of you who are in a relationship, there are things you willingly do for your significant other and there are things you do begrudgingly for your significant other. That's just a part of being in a relationship. We should give willingly to God's work. I don't know if God would tell you to keep you money or time or talents if you were giving them unwillingly, but I'm guessing he would rather you give willingly as he has given to you willingly, out of his love.

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Now we turn our attention to the question [SLIDE] *what* should we give. There are three things that we should give to God that are suggested by this passage. First, David and the people gave God their gold and silver. They gave back to God [SLIDE] *financially* – money and possessions. Again, Jesus talked more about our relationship with our money and possessions than he did anything else, except the Kingdom of heaven. As I mentioned earlier, our financial giving is governed by the principle of the tithe. Scripture says that a tithe, or a tenth of everything that is yours already belongs to the Lord because it came from him and is therefore holy. [Lev 27.30] So everything we have belongs to God and he wants us to honor him by giving only 10% of it back to him. We get to keep 90%! I wish the IRS were like that. The prophet Malachi concludes that to keep the tithe that belongs to God is considered stealing from God. In the Old Testament they brought their tithe to the temple which is where they worshiped. So I believe that we give our tithe where we worship – here at First UMC.

Jesus talked so much about our possessions and our love for them. He told us to let go of our love for them and to love him instead. But, people often falsely believe that Jesus didn't mention the tithe so he must not have thought much about it, so we don't have to follow it. To that I answer, "Hold on bison breath." Jesus did speak about the tithe, but it's a little bit hidden. In Matthew 23, Jesus lambasts the Pharisees for all they are doing wrong. There's a whole section of "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees..." In one small section of his rant, he acknowledges that these two groups tithe everything, clear down to the spices they have on their shelf - their mint, dill and cumin. Then he goes on to rip them saying that they often forget the other parts of the law like justice, mercy and faith. Jesus then finishes by saying: [SLIDE] *You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.* [23] So Jesus tells us to tithe to God's church, but also to attend to the larger issues facing so many people.

We here at First UMC believe that all of us should practice tithing. We understand that tithing is part of the five practices that we follow here. (Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, Intentional Faith Development) It's a part of Extravagant Generosity. We also understand that, some folks, particularly those starting out in the faith and those who haven't been exposed to tithing, aren't spiritually ready to tithe. But we also understand that tithing is one of God's calls on our life. We here at First UMC believe tithing is a spiritual discipline no different than prayer, reading scripture, or any of the other disciplines we expect Christians to practice. It is our expectation that people who attend this church give a proportion of their income, whatever level that may be to start, with the goal to move to tithing as a way to show their spiritual growth and their love for and loyalty to God.

There are other things to give besides our tithes and financial offerings. Back to the scripture. Remember there were literally tons of provisions given to build the Temple. The gold and silver was given so that the craftsmen would have the necessary provisions to work with. These craftsmen were giving their talent to God through the building of the Temple. And we should be doing the same – [SLIDE] *giving* back to God our talents. You may not think of yourself as being particularly talented but everybody has things that they are good at and that they enjoy doing. Those are gifts from God. You may be using your talent to make a living, your vocation, or you may be using your talent to do something you like, your avocation. These are the talents that God has given you and you have a responsibility to give them back to God by using them in his work. You may think of your talent only as a way to make a living, but you need to start seeing as a way to do ministry as well.

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The last thing to give God is our [SLIDE] time. This is closely related to giving God our talent. If the craftsmen were to give God their talent in constructing the temple, then they were going to have to give him a good amount of their time as well. Next to our money our time is probably our most precious commodity. It seems like we never have enough time. But if we are to give our talent to God we must also give our time to God. It takes time to prepare for and teach a Sunday School class or Bible study. It takes time to clean the church or pay the church bills. It takes time to practice in the praise team. It takes time to minister to our community. Everything takes time and so we must be willing to carve the necessary time out of our busy schedules.

It's easy to remember these three things that we give to God if we remember a three legged stool. One leg represents our finances and possessions. We give our tithes, what God deserves, and on top of that we give our offerings to support specific ministries. Everything we have comes from God, so we can give some of it back to God. The second leg represents our talents. God gave us abilities to use for his kingdom. Finally, the third leg represents our time. God gave us time on this earth so we can give our time back to doing God's work on this earth – *Building God's Community*. God expects us to generously and willingly give him our tithe, talent and time. Those are the signs of our love and loyalty to God.

We give back to God because of his rescuing us from the muck and mire of our life, because of the good things he has given us and because of the things he will give us as we live our lives. But as much as we give back to God let me remind you of one extremely important fact. Here it is: no matter how much you give to God, [SLIDE] you can never out give God. God has given us what we could never give back to him. First, God has given us our very life. Without God bringing us into this world, we wouldn't be here. God was there when you were conceived and has been with you ever since. Second, God gave us a way to go home to him. We could not do it on our own; the chasm was too wide. So, God gave his own son so that we could have eternal life with him. And God has given us all we have. So try as we might, no matter how much we give, we can never out give our all-giving God.