

In a previous church someone asked me once, "Scott, why do you preach about money?" That is a terrific question. I am convinced when we talk about money, or stewardship that we are really talking about is trust! We are asking the most basic question of all, who are you going to trust with your life? Are we going to trust God? Or are we going to go it alone and trust ourselves?

I think most of us here would like to say, I am going to trust God. But the reality of our every day existence is one of really trusting ourselves and our wits. We are good at taking care of ourselves.

I am reminded of a story about a captain of a plane that was flying from New York to San Francisco. One of the engines caught fire. The captain came on the speaker system, calmly reassuring the people that the fire would soon be out. Besides, the plane could fly just as well with three engines as with four.

Unfortunately, a second engine burst into flames. Once again the captain spoke to the passengers, saying that two engines were sufficient. But then, a third engine was suddenly ablaze. The captain said no more. There was only silence from the front of the plane. Soon the captain appeared in the cabin with a parachute on his back. He said calmly to the passengers, "Don't anyone panic, I'm going for help." And out he jumped.

The pilot took care of himself first. Unfortunately, so do we. We are good at it. Too often, our daily lives reflect a pre-occupation with ourselves and not the interests of God in this world. We have learned how to care for ourselves and we have learned well. However, there is a problem.

Many of us dream of living a fulfilling life. We dream of living in a way that makes our hearts soar. Yet the reality for many

of us is that we live with a fear of not having enough. Not having enough to get by, or to make it through, so we hold on and hoard.

Paul understood that. This is why he said, "*The point is this, the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly . . .*"

We hold back in our giving, because we are afraid we may not have enough. When we hold back in our giving, we also end up holding back in our living.

Paul understood that the key to living a fulfilling life is not in trusting in ourselves. Not in trusting in our ability to get rich or provide for ourselves. The key to a life worth living is not in money or wealth or possessions, but it is in trusting God with our lives.

It is in letting our attitudes toward money and possessions reflect an attitude of placing God first for our lives. That is what it means to live, truly live a life that is worthwhile and exciting.

Are you willing to place your trust in God? Are you willing to give to God from your treasure as a way to say God, I trust my life to you? Are you willing to say, nothing matters as much to me, as living for you?

Paul goes on to write, "*the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful give. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.*"

Paul is inviting us to not only trust God with our words, but to put that into action through our giving as well. As we get ready to turn in our pledges for next year, are you willing to put your trust of God into action through what you give back to God?

For when we give with generosity, Paul reminds us that *"our lives will be enriched and we will be able to celebrate God's gifts."*

I want to share with you a letter I recently saw that really touched my life. It is a letter from Jeff and Julie, who wrote it to their pastor in Naperville, Illinois.

Dear Pastor,

We moved here for a business opportunity that ended up not working out, and we soon found ourselves in a desperate financial situation. We were behind in our rent and car payments. We had back IRS payments, 16 credit cards with more than \$40,000 in debt and not enough food in the fridge. On top of all that, we decided to start a business.

Well, in the middle of this, one of the pastors challenged us to include our finances in our commitment to following Jesus and I really struggled with this. It wasn't that I didn't want to support our church or set an example for others to follow. It was that Julie and I were so broke that on occasion we ended up going to a friend's restaurant to ask for free food.

I thought, "If I am struggling to keep my family, how can I commit what I don't have to God? What am I supposed to do? Just write a check for 10 percent of my income and hope something happens?" The pastor urged me to trust God and give it a shot.

After prayer and discussion, we decided that God would get the **first portion of every check** and not just what we were willing to give each week. We decided to make God the first priority in our lives and we had no idea how we'd get by.

The week after this decision, my brother and I were dropping off flyers at a construction site looking for work. We'd started a carpentry company. We met a builder and he asked if we would be interested in doing their work. He had a house that was ready for us to start immediately and about 20 more to do during the next 12 months.

What an answer to prayer! Julie and I no longer questioned how we'd honor our financial commitment. We increased our giving.

If the story ended there, it would be a good story. However, you cannot out-give God. Over the next couple of years through a divinely orchestrated series of events, Julie and I also went from renters to homeowners. Owning a home has given us the ability to restructure our debt and has also given us some security and stability. I felt the need to tell our story.

The story is about much, much more than finances. ***It's about faith. Stepping out and trusting God with all we have, our lives, our future, our relationships, and even our finances.*** Now as I reflect on this story of what we have experienced, I am still trying to answer one question. What was it we sacrificed?

What a powerful witness and testimony from a couple that learned through placing God first, even in tough economic times that God would provide for them. That taught them to live with thanksgiving and generosity.

When you face challenging times, personal or economic, what is stopping you from placing God first? Isn't it about time to let God be God? Isn't it about time to let Jesus be the lord of your life?

May God help us be faithful in our living and in our giving.

Amen