

What's In Your Wallet: Unlimited Reward
Last in a Series on Giving
Oct. 17, 2021
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Prayer: Dear God, Open us wide to the goodness, beauty, and truth of your unlimited nature and how we are a part of it. In Jesus' name and by his example, amen.

Message

What's in your wallet? That's the question we set out to answer in this year's giving campaign. It's an interesting and clever question used by financial giant Capital One, but when asked of our spiritual life, and applied to our understanding of giving the question challenges us to consider what we have, what we do with what we have, what we give, and how we live our lives with God and with one another.

By asking this question we invited you to reflect on how you participate in the unlimited nature of God and how God can provide, build, and sustain unlimited possibility, connection, treasure and reward when we, God's people, follow the example of Jesus and risk what we have for God.

Through you. Through me. Through us and them. Through the church - the body of Christ. Whether it is our prayers, presence, or practice; our time, talents, and tithe, or our heart, mind, and money, we both experience the unlimited-ness of God as well as become a part of it.

This series had very little to do with your actual wallet and everything to do with your heart. Where your heart is, there your treasure is also. Truth be told, it

is all about your understanding of a giving God and how we are created to live in relationship with God and with one another. When that happens successfully - as taught and modeled by Jesus, we find ourselves bringing about the Kingdom of God right here, right now.

In Matthew chapter 5 and 6, before the parables that describe what the Kingdom of God is like, Jesus instructs the disciples and early followers on why he came, his purpose, and how they are to live in community. They were instructed to model a different way of being community. That is still the call for followers today. It is why we have this conversation about giving, tithing, and the sharing of our gifts. In a world that tries everything it can to divide, fracture, and pit us against one another, it is critical we remember that as followers of Jesus, we are to model a different way, a better way - the Jesus way.

In Matthew chapter five and six, it was still early in Jesus' ministry and word was growing of who he was and what he could do. Large crowds began following him and the disciples. People brought the sick and lame. A large crowd gathered, and giving what is called the sermon on the mount, Jesus addresses several topics and lays out what is important and expected of the people of God.

Jesus told the people:

You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.

I do not come to abolish the law of Moses but to fulfill its purpose.

Just say a simple, yes, I will or no, I won't.

Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do - blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity.

When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.

When you fast, don't make it obvious and try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire you for fasting.

Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven.
No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money.

Do not worry about everyday life - isn't life more than food and your body more than clothing?

All of these teachings lead to the most important one - the reason and motivation for all the rest. The heart of Jesus' teaching is that above all else we are to seek the Kingdom of God, live righteously, and trust completely that God will give us everything we need.

Seek the Kingdom of God. In later chapters of Matthew, we are told, just as the disciples and the crowd that day, what the Kingdom of God is like - what the nature of God is like. It is that of kindness, support, compassion, unity, fairness, faithfulness, empowerment, transformation, growth, and community. It is not division, injustice, and exclusion. Of course it is not easy or without burden, pain or sorry. Yet it is rooted in the unity of Christ.

This series then is about taking a good hard look within our hearts and asking ourselves what is it we are going to give - how are we going to give out of what we have been given by God in the first place? How are we to participate in the Kingdom of God? How is living with God and with one another related to the unlimited nature of God?

Pastor Andy and I have talked recently about that little word, with, as it relates to being with staff, with one another as a team, with a member of the church, with the larger denomination of the UMC, with the local community, and with the congregation in worship and in service. With - it is not the same as being for someone or working for a cause. It is not the same as doing something for someone. It is being fully present, actively listening, mutually sharing, sitting in the messy middle and life's moments of struggle and success with one another. We are called, commanded even, do this thing called community, with one another church. We do this with God; with Jesus showing us the way, and with the Holy Spirit giving us all we need.

God is with us through God's unlimited love - "for God so loved the world that God gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life” - we are with God and one another when we share that love through genuine giving and serving.

God is with us through God’s unlimited grace - “by grace, we are forgiven time and time again” if we but seek God. And we are with God and each other when we offer grace to ourselves and others inside and outside these walls.

God is with us through God’s unlimited strength and comfort - “even youth will stumble and fall but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” And we are with God when we offer that safe place, hope-filled space, and comfort to those in need.

God is with us through God’s unlimited peace - “a peace that passes all understanding” and cradles all of us in the tension of living. And we are with God when we set aside our hurtful criticism and judgment of those we disagree with or who we refuse to acknowledge and instead seek unity.

God is with us through God’s unlimited faithfulness - Jesus says “never will I leave you or forsake you.” God’s presence through the Holy Spirit is always with us in ways we aren’t always aware of. God is steadfast and true. And we are with God when we trust God’s Spirit to lead us into deeper understanding and deeper connections inside and outside these walls.

Opening your wallet is about opening your heart - your gifts, talents, prayers, presence, participation, and giving yourself and your resources to the God of unlimitedness. It is about serving *with* God and bringing about God’s beauty,

goodness, and truth to a world that not only needs it but longs and aches for it in ways we might not even know or comprehend.

Turning in a commitment card is only one small piece of the unlimited potential God sees and wants to bring to fruition through each and every one of us. Maybe this year we can approach the giving of our cards as the giving of our hearts; putting our hearts in the offering basket, not just a piece of paper. May it be a recommitment and a deeper understanding of what it means to give to our giving God.

For some, it may be just that, a recommitment, for others maybe this is the first time you feel like it means something more; something deeper, something bigger, not just going through motions but truly giving from the heart. Leave it to a pastor to take a sermon on stewardship and turn it into an altar call. But why not? Maybe it's both.

We invite you to come forward with your card today, not as a way to single out anyone or make you feel uncomfortable but because there is something about approaching the altar one by one and as a whole. There is something about coming forward on your own and with others to the symbol of God's presence - a visual of coming to God, of taking action to come to Jesus and actively give yourself to God.

As you come forward, place your commitment card in the basket provided. The prayer rails are available for anyone wanting or needed to take a moment of prayer.

Those of you online, please know you can mail in your commitment card or drop it off at the church office throughout the week. You will notice a prayer on the screen and you are invited to pray with us as a way to connect and be a part of this moment with us and us with you.

Let us, as the people of God, give of ourselves and from our bounty, to the work and goodness of God's kingdom here on earth. May that in and of itself be our unlimited reward.

Amen