

Today I'd like to talk with you a little bit about stewardship; every year around this time we talk about stewardship. Usually that's in the sense of our financial gifts to the church. Over the years we've done a variety of things regarding stewardship: we've asked for your pledge or estimate of giving for the coming year, sometimes we've asked you to just write that number down and post it on your refrigerator or somewhere in your home where you can keep that in front of you, other times we've asked for your understanding of how you're stewarding your gifts - who you are to the church. We've done all kinds of things. This year we are going to do some fun things. Ken McVey, as the Chairman of the Finance Committee, is working on some songs that speak to what it means to be a part of Central. We're going to have fun with those over the course of November.

In terms of giving to the church I've seen a little bit of everything. There are those who want you to tell a dramatic story that's changed a life and that will inspire someone to give to your church. Other people want to see the budget and how everything lines up, penny-by-penny. Other people feel that if they don't fill out a pledge card we haven't really done a pledge campaign. Other people don't want you to ask at all. Some people want an ATM in the church gathering area so they can get some money out and give it to the church because they don't have a checkbook any more. Other people just want to give online and never want you to ask anything else. We still pass the collection plates on a Sunday morning, even though most people don't carry cash or checkbooks. So giving to the church financially is sort of an elusive thing.

Then there's also the question of, "How much do I give?" Traditionally the church has talked about the tithe, 10% of Does that include my retirement account of my 'offshore assets in the Cayman Islands?"

I don't know. What I do know is that in the Hebrew Bible in the Old Testament God called God's people to give their best, their sacrificial offering. In that day it included generally the death of an animal - their most prized, their first, their best. By the time Jesus talked about what it means to give, He talked about it more poetically. He talked about what it meant to take up the cross and follow Him as giving one's life. He invited a young man who thought he had it all to give everything away and follow Him. He talked about a woman who gave just a little bit, but it was the most anyone gave. So Jesus turned all that giving stuff on its head. What I know is that whether it was God speaking in the Hebrew Bible or Jesus speaking in the Gospels, offering and making a sacrifice is part of it.

Now John Wesley, when he was leading the Methodist movement had questions come to him about, "What should we do with money? How does that all work?" Wesley talked about it more generally. In his sermon on money Wesley talked about what it meant to do three things: to earn all you can, to save all you can and to give all you can. I think that's a great way to talk about our stewardship. I want to read to you a quote from that sermon.

*"In order to see the ground and reason of this consider when the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into bring and placed you in this world; he placed you here not as a proprietor, but as a steward. As such He entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but the sole property of these still rests in and cannot be alienated from Him. As you yourself are not your own but His, such is all that you enjoy; such is your soul, your body and your substance in particular - not your own, but God's. He has told you, in the most clear and express terms, how you are to employ it for Him in such a manner that it may be all a holy sacrifice, acceptable through Christ Jesus. This light, easy service He has promised to reward with an eternal weight of glory."*

I love how Wesley says it. We are stewards of that which God has entrusted to us 'for a season.' So Wesley's mandate to earn all we can, to save all we can and to give all we can is a great way to talk about what it means to be a good steward. The other thing I suspect is that for Wesley this wasn't a decision that a family made in isolation. Instead Wesley would have assumed that people were in small groups of classes or bands and that they would gather and they would talk about what it is they earned and what they saved and what should they give. Sometimes having an outside perspective like that can be very valuable in terms of our stewardship of our gifts.

What do you have that can benefit the church and its mission? So as we come to this season of November and Thanksgiving and stewardship, I would invite you to simply consider the teaching of John Wesley - to earn all you can, to save all you can and to give all you can. In the end what we know is that Catalytic Generosity - generosity that changes things - is Central to Life.