

Thoughts on Financial Stewardship by Rev. Craig Goodwin

“Let everyone regard themselves as the steward of God in all things they possess.” John Calvin

● **Stewardship trains us in generosity.** The sharing of our financial resources is vital for our spiritual formation as disciples of Jesus Christ. John Ortberg explains this truth in the excerpt below;

“All day long we are bombarded by the prophets of more. ‘Use me, buy me, drive me, wear me, try me, put me in your hair.’ Serving the ‘more monster’ can never satisfy our souls. Yet in the short run, saying no to more can be difficult, even frightening. What does it take to tame the monster of more? What does it take to transform a heart from greed to generosity? For most of us, it will not come simply by acquiring more knowledge, applying more willpower, or even by studying more Scripture, as important as those things are. The more monster is too strong. We need a way of training. We need a tangible and routine way to say, “Sorry, money, you are not on the throne. You will not be the god of my life today.” What we need, God has provided. It’s called tithing.”

Tithing comes from the word that literally means “a tenth.” So to tithe is to give a tenth of our income. I fully recognize that this practice of tithing is a bit extraordinary. According to the IRS, the average American household gives around 3% of household income to charities. While this practice stands out as unique, it has been the wisdom of the people of God for thousands of years to practice tithing.

● **Stewardship reminds us that we belong to God.** God instructed Moses to tell the people; “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” (Leviticus 27:30) We can see here that the foundations of tithing are not budgetary, but theological. Tithing trains us in the truth that we “belong to the Lord.” The memo box on every check we write to the church can rightly be filled with the words, “I belong to God.”

● **Stewardship is an extension of our commitment to justice.** I find it interesting that Jesus’ only recorded mention of tithing has to do with the legalistic Pharisees. He says, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth...But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.” (Matthew 23:23)

Jesus reminds us that stewardship for Millwood Presbyterian is not a matter of building up our budget for our own sake, it is an extension of our commitment to mission. We are called to extend the justice and mercy of Jesus Christ to the world, starting in the West Valley of Spokane.

● **Stewardship is a source of joy.** I like the way Chuck Craft describes this. As an advocate for stewardship in the Presbyterian Church, he says, “People who give – willingly, to a cause they believe in – like to give. They enjoy it.” I hope that is the case for you.

My prayer is that we are led to give not out of obligation or guilt, but out of a strong sense of joy in the God who loves us.

I hope these brief reflections are helpful for you and your family in this season of stewardship planning. I count it a great privilege to serve as your pastor and walk with you as a fellow traveler on this journey into God’s grace.