

Stewardship as a Spiritual Discipline, 9/28/08, Pastor James E. Reents  
Giving to God by Mark Allen Powell

Grace, mercy & peace from God our Father & our Lord & Savior, JC. Amen

TEXT-Matt. 6:21 Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

PRAY-Dear God, guide us in our stewardship so that our commitments will deepen our love for you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Patterns are difficult to break.

Years ago my wife, Karyl, had trouble sleeping. She talked about getting medical help. I said, “I have an idea that may save us a lot of money. I have some old sermons on cassette tapes for you to listen to at bedtime.” To which she responded, “Why do you think it is only the old sermons that will put me to sleep?”

My heart was broken. She is sleeping better than ever, and I cry myself to sleep every night.

If only changing our giving patterns was that easy. Yet the interpretation of our text by Mark Powell helps us to do that. I hope it helps you as much as it has helped me.

#### Part I

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” He had it wrong, didn’t he?” Shouldn’t he have said, “Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also?” Our heart comes first and our treasure follows. Discover someone’s passion, and they will not count the cost in sacrificing for that passion.

Why do you parents make such great sacrifices for your children? Because you love them.

Why are people so dedicated to AA, hospice, suicide prevention, or the Relay for Life? Most of them have had someone in their family helped by these efforts, and they want to help others in return.

In Mark 7:6 Jesus criticized the Pharisees saying, “You honor me with your lips but your heart is far from me.”

Within the past 2 weeks there was a heart wrenching story on the front page of the Chicago Tribune. You remember all the rain of 2 weeks ago. A 10 year old boy was standing by a body of water and fell in. A neighbor went in after the boy. When he didn't come up, The neighbor's father went in after him.

The boy was sucked into a culvert, passed through the culvert and came out on the other side. He was scratched up but still alive. I'm sorry I can't say the same for the neighbor or his father. Both perished.

The front page of the Tribune shows the widow and her comments. She said, "It doesn't surprise me that my husband died to save a child. His whole world was about helping kids." He was a high school English teacher and coach.

Passion leads to giving. If we don't have passion for our faith or the building campaign, we probably won't do much to support it.

I have preached many stewardship sermons on this theme of passion first and commitments second.

## Part II

But that isn't what Jesus said. He said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Before we go home and change our Bibles, we better ask ourselves what Jesus meant. Are there limitations to our passions or feelings or emotions?

Passions and feelings are powerful, but I shudder to think what will happen if they rule our lives. Sometimes our hearts are overflowing with love and with the best of intentions we decide to feed the hungry, cloth the naked and visit the sick and imprisoned. But sometimes our enthusiasm wanes, and people who are counting on us suffer.

At other times our hearts harden. People we help may not react the way we desire and our giving decreases.

I enjoy exercising in the AM. However, I've learned not to decide if I will exercise based on if I feel like exercising in the morning. I go no matter what. In 40 years of exercising I have missed less than 5 days because of the weather. A Gortex running suit does wonders.

Our Gospel includes the parable of 2 sons. It was the discipline of going to work that was praised rather than the feeling of saying 'yes' and not going.

In the last verse of the Gospel the elders and chief priests were criticized for not changing their minds as well as their hearts.

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson from Philippians speaks of Jesus emptying himself and God exalting him. That required discipline as well as love.

The central part of the drama of salvation is an act of humble service.

Our hearts, feelings & emotions are powerful, but they are not adequate in themselves.

### Part III

Maybe Jesus had it right, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We can influence our actions. We can act first and allow our feelings to follow. We can be proactive and give where we want our heart to be and let our heart catch up. Sometimes it is easier to act into a new way of thinking than to think or feel our way into a new way of acting.

Our treasure is not just \$ but time, possessions, family, physical bodies, etc.

In our Marriage & Family Therapy classes we learned the goal of marriage is intimacy. The currency of intimacy is spending time together, that is quality time doing and sacrificing for each other.

Our actions influence our values and how we feel. We are a different person if we spend an evening at the library or a bar. Spending a weekend at a retreat, as 50 of our women did yesterday, points us in a different direction than spending a weekend shopping.

I'm very proud of a member of our small group named Marilyn. She is on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic. Please pray for a safe return trip for them tomorrow.

This is not her first mission trip. Marilyn has been to Belize twice and Ecuador once. No doubt she has a passion for mission work. But that passion has resulted in action. One experience has led to another and deepened her commitment and faith. Her treasure deepened her heart.

I believe the teacher who drowned trying to save his 10 year old neighbor did not just act on an instant impulse. He previously dedicated his life to helping young people and sacrificed for them. His actions were a result. That is the reason his wife wasn't surprised at his actions.

Of course the child felt terrible. He said, "I wish he had not loved me so much." Love is seen in actions. At the visitation the widow went to the boy and hugged him and said, "It's not your fault." Her actions saved the boy again, a second time. Her treasure resulted in a change of heart.

#### Part IV

The conclusion of all this is our stewardship is a spiritual discipline. It is equally as valid as prayer, fasting, worship and Bible study.

How we spend our treasure, determines who we become. There is a direct connection between stewardship and spirituality. We can make our hearts feel what we don't feel. The spiritual principle of renunciation can transform us.

I will close with some examples from Mark Allen Powell.

When Mark was a college student he was a Jesus freak. He heard an evangelist speak at a coffee house. He said, "If you want Jesus to be first in your life, get rid of what is second." Get rid of the competition to putting Jesus first. So he decided to do that. He loved his record collection and gave it away. In some ways that was foolish, and he would not recommend it today. But he never regretted doing that. It was a good spiritual discipline for him.

A couple gave up money they had saved for a cruise to pay for the repairs for a van for traveling missionaries. A lady did not purchase a large screen TV, so the money could be used for a seminary scholarship. Mark's heart was warmed one fall when his son called from college and asked his parents not to purchase a Christmas gift for him. Instead he wanted the money to be given to fight world hunger.

Renunciation can be a spiritual discipline. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." With all our economic problems today, that would be dramatic spiritual growth.

If our financial drive is successful, but we do not grow spiritually, it will be a failure. On the other hand, if we allow it to lead to spiritual growth, it would be doubly successful. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.