

PRACTICES *Giving*

In this week's message on Exodus 20:15, "you shall not steal," Jeff shared Ephesians 4:28, *"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."* (ESV) So as we seek to put the 8th commandment into action, our shared practice this week is giving.

Our fears have taught us that to give anything is to be left with less. But the best things in life come from giving. Giving is central to God's economy ... We are stewards; we ultimately own nothing, because everything belongs to the Creator. To grow in the practice of giving we must acknowledge that everything I have and am is from God. God has made me in His image; I am His. So, if I am to take spiritual formation seriously, I am called to live like I am His, as a steward of the time, talent, and treasure He has provided me.

What's More Important To God?

"Then the Pharisees met together to think of a way to trap Jesus into saying something for which they could accuse him. They decided to send some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to ask him this question: 'Teacher, we know how honest you are. You teach about the way of God regardless of the consequences. You are impartial and don't play favorites. Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?' But Jesus knew their evil motives. 'You hypocrites!' he said. 'Whom are you trying to fool with your trick questions? Here, show me the Roman coin used for the tax.' When they handed him the coin, he asked, 'Whose picture and title are stamped on it?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. 'Well, then,' he said, 'give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.' His reply amazed them, and they went away." ~Matthew 22:15-22

In this text, Jesus teaches...

1. If that is all Caesar can put his image on, then by all means give it to him.
2. In the same way, give to God what He has placed His image upon – YOU!
3. God wants all of you, and we surrender all to Him and cooperate with what He is up to in and around us, we will be good stewards of the time, talent, and treasure with which He has blessed us.

How My Giving Impacts Spiritual Formation

"Just as you excel in everything else ... in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness ... see that you also excel in the grace of giving." ~2 Corinthians 8:7

Giving is a way to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and release His grace in our lives. As we give we are released to give as we have received, forgive as we have been forgiven, and serve as we have been gifted.

Giving as a Formative Practice

1. Giving draws me closer to God.
"Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." Matthew 6:21
2. Giving checks my bent towards "more."
"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to be generous and willing to share. In this way they may take hold of the life that is truly Life!" 1 Timothy 6:17-19
3. Giving strengthens my faith.
"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of your income, and he will fill your barns to overflowing." Proverbs 3:5,9
4. Giving is an investment for eternity.
"... Give happily to those in need, and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven - it is the only safe investment for eternity." 1 Timothy 6:18-19 (LB)
5. Giving blesses me in return.
"A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." Proverbs 11:25
"Good will come to him who is generous..." Psalm 112:5
6. Giving brings joy to my life.
(Jesus) "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving." Acts 20:35

(adapted from 2008 River Valley/Riverside Spiritual Formation handbook)