

Loving God through Stewardship

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Scripture Readings: Matthew 6:19–21; 2 Corinthians 5:10

Sermon Text: Luke 10:25–28

Introduction

It was a few days before Christmas, and Paul Goetchius looked like a dad picking up his daughter from college—greeting the smiling young woman outside the dorm, tossing her backpack into his SUV, and then easing out onto the snow-covered interstate. The next day, he did the same thing at a different college—and he did it again the next day, and the next day, and the next. By the time the holiday arrived, he'd put more than 1,000 miles on his Chevy Tahoe, bringing kids home from college. They weren't even his kids.

In the past eight years, Goetchius, 76 at the time the article appeared in the Washington Post, had logged over 64,000 miles driving low-income college students to and from universities all around New York state. The first student Goetchius drove to college was a young woman studying at the University at Buffalo. He had seen an article about a nonprofit that helps disadvantaged kids get to college. "I thought, 'Well, heck, I can drive a car.'" Eight years later, he was still at it, and that first rider is now a physician.

Sometimes, the students need rides because their family doesn't have a car. Sometimes, the students have no home. "I've given rides to college to kids who were living at the homeless shelter or on a relative's couch," Goetchius says. "Some of these kids are incredible, [in] what they overcome to get to college."

Goetchius doesn't just provide rides. If their dorm room doesn't have window screens or air conditioning, Goetchius will drive to the nearest Home Depot and purchase what's needed. If a student gets hungry on the long drives to and from [school], Goetchius never hesitates to get them a meal – which he always insists on paying for.ⁱ

Nina Irby was a student Goetchius transported all four of her years. She said she's not sure what she would have done without Goetchius's rides or his humility. She said, "I always told him, 'We never thanked you enough,' and he was just like, 'I don't do it for thanks.'"ii What an incredible story of loving God by loving others and the stewardship of God's gifts.

God's grace poured out on us

Have you ever considered what God has done for you? If ever there was a time when there was nothing, there would still be nothing. Yet you are here in a magnificent universe with a carefully crafted planet and solar system as your home. The fact that you and the universe exist means that an immensely powerful, wise, and good Creator exists. The universe certainly did not bring itself into existence, so the existence of the Creator is obvious and necessary.

Have you ever considered that it is possible that you had never been brought into existence? Yet you exist by the grace of God, and I suspect you would have to say that existence is better than non-existence. If you never existed, you would have never experienced the joys that we experience in life: a warm summer breeze, a beautiful sunset, an amazing night sky, the birth of a child, the joy of a new puppy, the maturing of children, the love and kindness of friends, the success of a child, the joys and challenges of marriage, a bright winter landscape, the brilliant colors of fall arrayed like an impressionist painting, or the hope and promise of a verdant spring season. It is only because God made you to exist do you experience any of these things.

God, your Father, knit you together in your mother's womb, and He knows the number of hairs on your head and your every thought and concern. Do you ever consider that you have had food, perhaps a thousand meals per year and tens of thousands of meals over the course of

your life, all provided ultimately by a planet and ecosystem that produces food that sustains and nourishes your body? And what about a place to live, warmth in the winter, shelter from storms, vehicles to transport you, and the fuel to power them that began to form when the dinosaurs roamed the Earth? God has provided all these things for you.

What about schools to educate you and jobs to grow you and allow you to flourish? Have you ever considered that you have had times of great joy, great seasons of success, and challenges that have made you better? I suspect that you have not rejoiced for the challenges of aging, but how else would you know that you are a finite, limited being who depends on God? What about parents who brought you into the world, who cared for you and nurtured you, loved you, and were concerned about your flourishing? What about the family members, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, and friends who have brought joy into your life? Beyond family and friends are many people who have helped you to grow to become the best version of yourself. What about the church family and the church, which is a place of refuge in a fallen world? God has provided all these things for you.

Do you remember the times of great sorrow about events in your life, perhaps praying through the night in agony for God to help? Do you remember how God has answered your prayers, perhaps not always in the way you desired, but nevertheless, you were able to move forward in life? Do you remember the hard and painful times when God held your hand as you walked through them? Do you remember how he sustained you and loved you? Do you remember the times when God protected you from the legitimate consequences of your foolish acts? I certainly do. Perhaps it was then you came to understand the meaning of the phrase: *there but for the grace of God go I.*

But God has done much more for you. Don't forget the 1000-page book that God gave you (the Bible) that reveals God to you and tells you that you are His and that He created you in His image. That Book is God's instruction manual that tells you how to live, and when you follow it, you flourish spiritually as God guides you through His Word. That book tells you who you are and to whom you belong and shows you how to live and be saved. In the book, God tells you that He loves you. In fact, He loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for you. And when you pass from this Earth, God promises that you will live in His presence for all eternity in a place of great beauty that is beyond human understanding.

God has done all of this and much more for you. What do you owe your God and Creator? That is a very good question to ponder in this stewardship season. It seems to me you and I owe everything to Him, beginning with the fact that we exist in the first place. It seems to me we owe God for the totality of our beings. When we put all God has done for us in perspective, we should inquire of ourselves: what have we done for God, and how have we used our time, talents, and treasure to serve Him?

At one point in His ministry, as we learn in our sermon text, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus with a question to see if He could answer it. I love how Jesus handles this situation because he turns the question back on the lawyer. The lawyer asks Jesus what He must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with a question, saying to the Lawyer, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you? In that instant, Jesus turns the tables. Instead of Jesus being the one questioned, Jesus assumes His rightful role as the teacher.

The lawyer answers his own question, saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus affirms the Lawyer's answer, telling him that he answered correctly, which means we are all required to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In the Bible, the heart is the inner self that thinks, reasons, feels, and decides. It is in the heart that all emotions are experienced, including love, hate, joy, sorrow, peace, bitterness,

courage, and fear. Furthermore, the heart is a measure of someone's true character or personality, and in the Bible, hearts are said to be pure or evil, sincere toward God or hard toward God. Thus, to love God with our hearts is to love God with all of our intellectual and emotional capacities.

The soul animates our body and makes it alive. Many scientists assume that if the right atoms are combined into molecules and the right molecules are combined into cells, then living things can be produced in the lab. They will never do it because without the soul, which originates with our great and all-knowing God, dead matter will never live. Thus, to love God with all of our souls is to love Him with the essence of our beings to the greatest extent possible.

Strength refers to the physical ability of the body and the energy, focus, force, agility, or power an individual can apply. Strong individuals can do great things to accomplish a purpose; thus, in loving God, the strong person will turn their strength, perseverance, and capabilities toward loving God.

The mind in the Bible is sometimes used interchangeably with the soul. In the NT, the use of the word mind relates to understanding, thought, and reason. We tend to think of minds as morally neutral, but in the NT, we see that minds can be hardened against God (2 Cor 3:14), blinded (2 Cor 4:4), corrupt (2 Tim 3:8), debased (Rom 12:2), or, they may be pure (2 Pet 3:1). Finally, Christians can be in possession of the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), which is a desire to be obedient to Christ in all things (Phil 2:5-8).

Do you love your God? From this description, I hope you will see that loving God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind means loving God with the totality of your being, everything that you are. Jesus is calling you to love God with everything that you are. Do you love God in that way? Given what God has done for us, it should be our natural response to make Him the focus of our lives. It should be our natural response to serve him with all our resources.

The call of Christian stewardship is to commit a portion of our time, talent, and treasure to God. Stewardship is not just about money, for we can also serve God with our time and the talents He has given us. God has called us to advance His kingdom on Earth by spreading the gospel, worshipping Him, reaching out to our community, and making disciples of Jesus. Our church exists to do the things I just said, and thus, we need leadership, a staff, a building, and funding to do God's work in Winsted. A local church must rely on its members and friends to provide the financial resources, the people power to do the work, and the human talent to manage and complete our work for God.

Motivation for Stewardship

I'd like to consider our motivation for stewardship briefly. First, giving of our time, talents, and treasure builds and expands the kingdom of God on Earth. Each week, we pray in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come." When we pray that, we are waving on the kingdom of God, hoping that it will advance swiftly, expressing our desire that God will rule and overtake this fallen world and make it right. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we are praying that God will convert the hearts of men, women, and boys and girls. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we affirm that we want the work that Jesus initiated to advance to spread and overtake the corrupt and evil kingdom of the world. Yet, often, we do not put our money where our mouth is in the Lord's prayer.

In his article, "*How America Got Mean*," published in the September 2023 issue of the Atlantic Magazine, the well-known columnist David Brooks writes that the usage of certain words that used to be associated with virtuousness is on the decline in America. The use of the word bravery dropped by 65%, appearances of the word gratitude dropped by 58%, and the use

of the word humbleness dropped by 55%. The indication is that Americans find these virtues far less important than in former times. Brooks says:

For decades, researchers have asked incoming college students about their goals in life. In 1967, about 85 percent said they were strongly motivated to develop “a meaningful philosophy of life”; by 2000, only 42 percent said that. Being financially well-off became the leading life goal; by 2015, 82 percent of students said wealth was their aim.

There is an unnatural focus in America on gaining and keeping wealth. As Christians, our focus must be God’s eternal kingdom because our present world is temporary, and the wealth we attain here will not help us in God’s eternal kingdom. In fact, storing up excessive wealth will be hard to explain when we stand before God. We all need to plan for retirement, but it must not become an obsession; our efforts and financial commitments to advance God’s kingdom will store treasure for us in heaven, where it will last forever.

If we truly want God’s kingdom to spread and flourish on the Earth, we must be all in and generous with our time, talents, and treasure. And again, it is not just about money. Most of you know that I had the opportunity to study under Dr. Norman Geisler during my seminary years. Dr. Geisler was one of the most renowned and prolific Christian theologians and apologists of the last fifty years. He wrote over 100 books, taught thousands of seminary students, and started two seminaries, one on the east coast and one on the west coast.

I will never forget what Dr. Geisler said about his thought process in taking or leaving jobs. He said that when new teaching or leadership opportunities arose, no matter the salary, he would select the opportunity with the greatest potential for service to God and expanding His kingdom. Geisler’s words left a deep impression on me because they are in accord with the words of Jesus, who says you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Dr. Geisler used his time, talent, and treasure to serve God, so he fully loved God. At his death on July 1, 2019, Dr. Geisler left a legacy that inspires, motivates, and informs hundreds of thousands of Christians, theologians, and pastors.

Norman Geisler used His entire being to serve God, which is what we all should do. Geisler’s teaching has greatly influenced me on this matter, and it is why I teach full-time at a Christian school, serve here at Second Congregational, write books, and run my website ministry explaining and defending Christianity. In the parable of the faithful steward, Jesus says, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.” At the beginning of this sermon, I described all that God has done for you and me. From that perspective, who can deny that God has given them much? Not one of us can deny that God has given us much, so at our death or at His return, whichever comes first, God will expect that we will have done much to serve Him with our time, talents, and treasure.

The second reason that motivates us to give up our financial resources to serve God is that we can’t take them with us, and if we do use them for God’s work on Earth, we will store treasure in heaven. When we give for God’s purposes, our gifts have eternal value because God’s kingdom is eternal. Jesus says in our first Scripture reading from Matthew 6:

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

If we use our treasure to do God's work on Earth, we will demonstrate our allegiance to God and our love for Him. In so doing, we will show that our hearts and minds are fully aligned with His Word, all that it teaches, and God’s purposes upon the Earth.

The third reason we should use our time, talents, and treasure to serve God is found in our second Scripture reading from 2 Corinthians 5:10, which reads, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad."

Paul is writing these words to Christian believers. Paul is not telling them how to be saved, for they had already been saved by faith in Christ. Paul writes in Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul is not telling the believers how they should be saved, for they already had been told and knew that they would only be saved by faith in Christ. Instead, Paul is warning the Corinthians that they would all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, as we all will, for an assessment of how they had used and what they had done with their time, talents, and treasure to serve God.

In other words, in plain English, each of us, you and I, will appear before Jesus to tell Him how we have served Him and failed Him in the life that we are currently living. Second Corinthians 5:10 is one of the verses that guides my life and it plays continuously in the back of my mind because I know that I will give an account for everything I have done in my life. As your pastor, I bear a lot of responsibility for telling you the truth of God's Word, and I am concerned every day about the spiritual growth of this congregation and our service to God. Furthermore, I am always concerned about how I am serving God.

Finally, the fourth reason we should use our time, talents, and treasure to serve God is that the one who sows generously will reap generously. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:6–7:

Now *I say* this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows generously will also reap generously. Each one *must do* just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Contributing to God's kingdom work is in our self-interest in many ways. Here, we find the principle that God will generously provide for those who use their money for God's work. God promises to bless those who support His work upon the Earth generously. You don't want to pass on or ignore that promise because many, including me, could tell you it is trustworthy. God blesses those who use their time, talents, and treasure to serve Him.

I will close with this. Denzel Washington is a highly respected actor and a deeply devoted Christian. A video surfaced of Washington offering some spontaneous career advice to a group of young actors. Although the setting is informal and his remarks are off-the-cuff and unrefined, it would be hard to find better advice on stewardship. Washington says:

I pray that you all put your shoes way under the bed at night so that you [have] got to get on your knees in the morning when you wake up to find them. While you're down there, thank God for grace and mercy and understanding. We all fall short of the glory ... but if you just start thinking about all the things you got to say "thank you" for, that's a day. That's easily a day! You'll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse ... Now, I've been blessed to make hundreds of millions of dollars in my life. I can't take it with me, and neither can you. It's not how much you have but what you do with what you have. And we all have different gifts: some money, some love, some patience, some the ability to touch people. But we all have it. Use it. Share it. That's what counts.ⁱⁱⁱ

To which I can only say Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/retiree-has-driven-over-64000-miles-to-ensure-low-income-students-can-get-to-class/>

ⁱⁱ Karen Weese, "This retiree has driven 64,000 miles helping low-income students get to college," Washington Post, Inspired Life (12-10-18)

ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph Sunde, "Denzel Washington: Share your Gifts; Don't Abuse Them," Acton (5-29-14)