

11/25/18

A Healthy Disciple Stewards A Life of Abundance
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John 12:20-26

Good morning and welcome to Brewster Baptist Church. My name is David Pranga. I am one of the pastors here. Pastor Doug and Jill are away this weekend enjoying Thanksgiving with family.

This week we continue in our series on “Becoming a Healthy Disciple – 10 Traits of a Vital Christian.” Today, we are looking at the 10th vital trait: A Healthy Disciple Stewards a Life of Abundance.

This past week we celebrated what holiday? Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. Thanksgiving is a time to gather with family and friends. It’s also time of unbelievable amounts of food. When Thanksgiving meal is set out, my experience is there is a huge amount of turkey, loads of mashed potatoes, piles of stuffing, gravy, cranberries, green bean casserole, deviled eggs, sweet potatoes, and dinner rolls. Not to mention pumpkin pie and apple pie with ice cream. You could say we have an abundance of food for Thanksgiving! I have never been to a table for Thanksgiving that did not have an abundance of food.

Let me ask you the question. How many of you consider yourself rich with abundance?

Most of us don’t see ourselves being rich and with abundance. Why? Because we can look around and know there is someone else who has more—a bigger house, a fancier car, or more gadgets. Because if we were rich, we would have money to buy the latest thing on the market. In fact, we are bombarded with TV ads and advertisements telling us we need the newest and greatest thing. In fact, we have a second holiday this week that people often celebrate. What do we call it? Black Friday. It’s where rich people who have an abundance of money and time go shopping—hunting for the best deals around. They get up early and shop the day away. They buy things for family members, friends and themselves.

Let me go back and ask the question: Do you consider yourself rich and with abundance?

This past week, I got on a website called “Global Rich List.” Global Rich List is a website that compares people and how rich they are compared to the rest of the world. www.globalrichlist.com They ask you one important question. How much do you make a year including your salary and benefits (insurance, retirement, etc.)? Let’s say you enter in that you made \$50,000. Then, you click on “show my results.” Presto, it shows you that you are in the top .31% of all people on the globe. You are in the top 1/3% of the entire world. Just by making \$50,000 a year. You are making more than 99.7% of all people in the entire world.

I decided to play the game again and entered \$25,000 a year, which includes salary and health insurance and benefits. I found that I would still be in the top 2% of the entire world. If I made \$25,000 then I would still be making more than 98% of the entire world.

According to world population, most people would look at us as being “rich and with abundance.” I have been to Africa and Central America, and people think we are “rich and

have abundance.” Why is that you may ask? Most of the world struggles with having clean water, food, having adequate shelter, clothing, shoes, and electricity.

This morning, I was given the task on talking about being a Christian who “Stewards a Life of Abundance.” Whether we realize it or not, every person in this room has abundance. We really have more than we need. We need to be good stewards of everything God has given us.

This morning’s text comes from *John 12:20-26*: “Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’ Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.’”

I want to set the stage for you. The Greeks were known as philosophers. They were seeking wisdom in how they were to live their life. The Greek culture was one in which the goal of human existence was bound up in “self-fulfillment and the attainment of things.” Sounds like Americans. Let’s go back to the passage; there are some “Greeks” who wanted to talk to Jesus about how they should live their life. How does Jesus respond to the disciples and Greek people? Jesus says the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Jesus goes on to share an illustration. It involves a “kernel of wheat”—something that was familiar with people of that time. Jesus says a kernel of wheat by itself is nothing. But if you put the kernel of wheat into the ground; it will die but can multiply and then produce many seeds and bear fruit.

Jesus was giving a two-part answer. Part 1: Jesus understood his time on earth was coming to an end. Jesus was letting his followers know he was going to die. In order for Jesus to be glorified, Jesus had a different plan in mind. It involved sacrifice, being crucified and death. Jesus had to die on the cross, so that we could have life. Jesus had to die on the cross, so that we could have forgiveness of our sins. Just as the kernel of wheat had to die in the ground for new life to come about, Jesus had to die on the cross. Then, Christianity could spread and multiply.

Jesus goes on in *verse 25* in how we should live. Let me read to you *verse 25*, “Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

Jesus came to the Jews and Gentiles with a new vision. It was not one of conquering and overthrowing the government and leaders. It was not about acquisition of power and the right to rule. Jesus taught that we need to sacrifice and die to oneself. We need to put Jesus first

and serve him, and then we will find the joy and peace we are looking for. Our own wants and desires need to be secondary. This was a new teaching for the disciples and followers.

I believe Jesus is asking his followers' one basic question. "Where is your heart?" How much do you love Jesus? How much do you trust Jesus? Are you willing to sacrifice your life and give it up for Him? I believe it's a "head and heart issue" when we become followers of Jesus. Our head represents knowledge. We need to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the son of God. We need to believe that Jesus died for our sin. We need to acknowledge that each of us is a sinner. We have to accept Jesus into our life. Our life needs to change and not just be head knowledge.

I have met people who have all the right answers but their life is nothing like that of a Christian. We can have all the right answers to the questions. God wants more. God also wants your heart. It is also a heart issue as well. To me the heart represents action. What am I willing to do for Jesus, now that he is Lord of my life? Am I going to honor God with my life, with my resources, and with my time?

In our Christian life, we need to love God with both our "head (knowledge) and heart (action)." A Christian who Stewards a Life of Abundance puts God first in their life. When we put God first in our life, our actions will need to follow. We will start caring about things of God and less about our things.

As you read the chapter "A Disciple who Stewards A Life of Abundance," I think it's really important to share a key theme for the chapter. "The healthy disciple recognizes that every resource comes from the hand of God and is to be used generously for kingdom priorities and purpose." (Steve Macchia) Everything we have is really a gift from God. God owns everything. We are only stewards of it. God wants us to use our resources generously for his kingdom, his priorities and purposes.

As I was reading the chapter this week, I picked out a few things that I believe are important. I want to share with you three resources that God gives each person that we need to be generous with.

The first deals with our **Attitude towards Money**. How many of us would be afraid to pull out our credit card statement, checkbook, and savings account, and discuss how we spend our money with a friend? Would our friend understand that God is important to us after we share with them how we spend and save our money? Would that friend say you are?

- A stingy Christian
- A generous Christian
- Wow, you're investing in the Kingdom of God!

When I look over my life, this is one area where God has taught me so much over the years. As a child and teenager, I was fortunate that I saw my parents practicing tithing and giving to the church and to people that were in need. Even though I knew it was important to my

parents, I knew it was important to God. I knew it was something I should do. I rarely practiced it as teenager and young adult. I remember back in high school, I had a job and my parents shared how I should give back part of my paycheck to God. Of course, I was a stubborn teenager and decided it was not in my best interest. I offered God plenty of excuses why I could not give or tithe to him. Years went by with my excuses! That all changed during my junior year of college when a speaker spoke on stewardship. I remember walking to a classroom. We all were sitting in chairs and there was a piece of paper on everybody's seat. It was titled "Excuses for Not Giving to God." On the paper were "Reasons Why" you could not tithe to God. Each timeframe went up by 5 years of age.

For Example:

Age 15 – It's my first job. I need spending money to hang out with my friends. I will do it later.

Age 20 – I'm broke in college. I will start after my first real job.

Age 25 – I'm paying off college loans. I will start later in life when I am finally stable.

Age 30 – I'm saving for my first house. I will start giving to you later.

Age 35 – I cannot give now because I have two young children. I need to start a college fund.

It went up and up until the person was 100 years old. Each time, the age group would give an excuse why they could not give at that time. I remember the speaker made two points.

1. There is never a good time to start tithing and giving back to God. It does not matter how much money you make or have. You just need to start. He challenged us to start today. Pick a % of your income. Just start! Stop giving God excuses to why you are not giving. God does not want to hear excuses anymore.
2. Are you smarter keeping 100% for yourself or giving a % back to God.

The speaker shared how when he gave a tithe / money back to God,

- It increased his faith and he had to rely more upon God more.
- It also increased his love for people because he was able to help people in need.
- The speaker shared how he was making a difference for God's kingdom through giving.

For some reason, the challenge of not making excuses and trusting God with my money hit me hard. I took the challenge after hearing that talk.

When I married Christy, it was also her commitment to God as well. Did we have difficult and challenging times in life? Yes. Was it hard to do? Yes. Yet, we continue to give to the best we can.

What I learned by giving and tithing to God?

- Everything really belongs to God.
- I had to learn to be content with what I have.
- I learned that God provides for me and really does meet my needs. "Miracles"

My challenge to you today is to give and tithe back to God. Stop making excuses and start giving back to God. Pick a % (2, 5, 10) that you can give to God monthly. I know it may seem scary. Trust him with your finances.

Before I leave the subject of money, I want to thank many of you who gave to ETC and helped meet the goal of \$50,000! I want to thank everyone who gives to the church and helps us to meet the budget each year and to our very generous mission and our deacon fund as well. I want to say thank you!

Attitude with Resources & Material Possessions

Stewardship not only involves money. It also includes our resources. The resources include everything we own, from our house, cars, van, clothing, musical equipment, furniture, lawn equipment, and so much more. When I look at every material possession I own, I believe that it is God's. You can use these things for his glory and to help people out.

Let me ask you how are using your resources to help people? When I look over my life, I have been very fortunate to see so many people step forward and use their resources to help people out.

- When I was youth pastor, I had a small car. I would call parents of the youth to see if I could switch vehicles with them. When I was 25, I did not have the greatest car. But parents would often switch vehicles with me for the weekend in order to take their teens to retreats. I was driving vans that cost three times my car.
- When I moved to Cape Cod, I called a friend of mine to see if I could use their summer home for a week or so until a winter house would open up. This family blessed our family and let us use their home for four months. The house was two blocks from the water. I had no idea what I was asking. They looked at their house as a resource from God.
- I had a friend in my last church that had a pool. She was an older woman. Yet she would invite younger moms with their children to swim in the pool. She would make them feel special and it became a way for moms to connect with each other and just share life together.
- I have another friend that opens their house to everyone. They have opened their house up to people that just moved to the Cape and had nowhere to go. They do it over and over again. Why do they do it? They look at their house as a blessing from God

When people look at their resources as a gift from God and that they are only the manager of the gifts, it is amazing to see how people help each other out. Your resources may not only be something you own. It can also be a skill or talent you have. I firmly believe God has given talents and skills for believers to bless people in and outside the church.

- One of my best friends is a car mechanic in Northboro, MA. He has his own shop. My friend helps single moms out from my previous church. He would repair their cars at a

huge discount or often for free. It was one way to help out. It was his ministry that he wanted to keep secret.

- I have another friend that has carpentry skills. He would come over and fix whatever needed to be fixed. He was just a guy that wanted to help when the need arrived.
- I have a few friends that I know who are well off and retired. They have a passion for youth. I have seen how these people have paid for someone to go to camp, paid for music lessons, and paid for painting and woodworking classes.

Let me tell you, the people who receive these gifts are blessed. But the people who gave the gift or shared their resources and talents are blessed just as much! I am a firm believer that everything we have is from God. Our attitude should be one of giving and helping other people.

Point to ponder: How are you using God's resources to help other people?

Attitude towards Time

Not only does God care about money and our resources. God wants us to be generous with our time as well. God cares how we spend our time.

How you spend your time reflects your love for God and his priorities. Would somebody see that God is a priority in your life when they look at your calendar? Or would they see God as a passing interest that comes and goes depending on the season?

Let me ask you a question. Many of you are Red Sox and Pats fans. How much time do you give in following your sport? Do you check the sports score every time they play? Do you schedule out time in your week to watch a football game? How much time do you give to the sports?

In the same way, if you look at your calendar, do you schedule out time to go to church? How much time we spend with God is important in our relationship with God. God wants us to be generous with our time with Him and serving others. I believe we can honor God with our time, when we serve other people.

There are plenty of examples of this:

- B&G team – we have men and women who serve on this team. The group of people serves to make the church a beautiful place. When things are broken, they fix it. When things need to be painted, they paint. This group of people comes once a week or once a month to help out. They have a blast using their gifts, and they are building community working together.
- Office Help team – We have ladies that help our office staff team get things done. We have different ladies that come in and serve in blocks of three hours and get administration tasks done around the office. They make a huge difference.

- Care & Transportation Team – This team visits people in the hospitals, nursing homes, as well as shut-ins. The transportation team takes people to doctor appointments. Each of these groups is needed in the church.
- Our church has so many places where you can serve and give of your time: worship welcome, nursery helper, teaching Sunday School, and handy helpers.
- Many of you enjoy the opportunity to serve when we do the Holiday Fair. You write it down on your calendar. You serve and you feel good about helping people out.

Let's not making serving only one day a year. It needs to be happening all the time. Just as you watch the Pats play every Sunday, I want to challenge you to set time aside and come to church on Sunday. I promise you that it will be worth it. For others of you, I want to challenge you to start giving of your time and volunteering. Make this church, your church. Start by helping out and serving. It could be once a month or every Sunday.

Let me tell you with giving, using our resources and serving it has helped me and many other people become closer to God. We see our priorities begin to change. Instead of focusing on ourselves, we begin to focus on God more and more. We begin seeing people through God's eyes. I have learned over time what it means to be generous.

In summary, "the healthy disciple recognizes that every resource comes from the hand of God and is to be used generously for kingdom priorities and purpose." This includes our money, our resources and our time.

My challenge to you this morning is:

1. Where is your heart? Does God have your whole heart this morning? Are you willing to give him everything—your Head and your Heart?
2. How is your attitude with money? Are you willing to tithe? No more excuses. For some of us we need to give back to God.
3. How is your attitude with resources? Are you using your resources to bless people?
4. How is your attitude with time? Do you need to prioritize God in your life more? Does Church need be a priority? Does serving need to be more of a priority?