

NOVEMBER 15, 2020

## The Spiritual Discipline of the Purse

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*1 Timothy 6:6-12*

When I was 8 years old, I wanted to give my mom a Mother's Day gift with my own money. My only source of income was collecting soda bottles and getting the 2-cent return. I had my eyes on a little golden ring box with red velvet lining. And, I succeeded returning dozens of bottles. My mom, at 91, still had the box on her dresser. She appreciated the love behind that gift.

So let's talk about the gifts we make to the church at Stewardship time. Let's talk about what we do with what we often call "our" money. Jesus talked about money all the time and Scriptures speak of money more than 800 times. Even the great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, once said that we need to experience three conversions in order to fully live our faith: a conversion of our heart, a conversion of our mind, and a conversion of our purse.

The truth is that the act of giving money is just as much a spiritual discipline as the act of bowing in prayer. It is not simply that this congregation needs us to give our money to pay for salaries and fund the ministry and mission God has given us. That is true, but it is not the whole story. We *need* to give. We need to give our money to God's work through the church so that we can remember to whom we belong.

We bear God's image. We belong to God, for we are all created in God's image. That means that all of who we are, all of who we will be—our lives, our work, our money, our time, our talent, our very being, our hearts and minds and souls and strength—all of it belongs to the one who created us.

Luther claimed we need a conversion of our purse not simply because the church cannot do its work without it, not just because the church needs our money, but even more because *we* need to give.

Why? What do we need? The spiritual discipline of the purse helps us to resist the power of money to define us, to tell us what we are worth or not worth, and to tell us to whom we belong. It is as much an act of resistance as it is of gratitude.

Dr. Craig Satterlee, a preaching professor, has written that in our culture, money tries to frame the way we view ourselves and others by determining what we are worth.

“Money becomes the criterion that determines whether others accord us dignity and respect or whether we experience shame and failure.” Satterlee continues, “Since others use money to determine whether we are worthwhile human beings, we eventually use this same yardstick to measure and define ourselves” (Craig Satterlee, *Preaching and Stewardship: Proclaiming God’s Invitation to Grow*). This is why we have to talk about money in church.

Giving opens up our imaginations so we see the world through God’s eyes.

Remembering God cannot only be an intellectual act; remembering God is also a practical act of managing our money and possessions differently.

Our financial stewardship is not primarily about what the *church* needs us to do. It is first and foremost about what *we* need to do for our own life of discipleship. Through the discipline of giving, we gratefully respond to God for blessings received and we become freed from the ways that money binds us. Again, to whom do we belong? Whose image do we bear? One reason why we need to give is to regularly remember God.

In the olden days, a preacher would teach a text one verse at a time, commenting along the way. It’s called “expository preaching” and is rarely done these days, but let’s give it a try. Listeners would follow along with the text, and you are welcome to do so, beginning with 1 Timothy 6, verse 6.

In this letter, Paul gives pastoral advice to Timothy, a young disciple who lives in Ephesus where he is a church leader. Paul is somewhere in Greece.

“There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment,” Paul writes in verse 6. A Christian should find some contentment in life. Life isn’t all about struggle and suffering and deprivation. Paul seems to suggest that some of the church members were comfortable, affluent.

But Paul observes in verse 7, “we brought nothing into life, and we’ll take nothing out with us.” What do we do with what we have now? The story is told of two elderly men paying a visit to the gravesite of their recently departed wealthy friend.

“How much do you suppose he left?” one asks.

“I reckon he left all of it,” the other responds.

Then comes a warning, that the flat-out pursuit of wealth as an end in itself is a kind of trap (verse 9). We know that now. There is never enough.

“Love for money,” Paul said, “is a root of all kinds of evil” (verse 10). Notice it’s not that money is evil. Christianity does not teach and never taught that. Jesus Christ coming into the world, Christianity maintains, is God’s blessing on the world and everything in it. Money is not evil. It’s the love of money that gets us in trouble.

“Set your first hope not on your portfolio, your savings account, your IRAs, but on God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment” (verse 17). God wants us to enjoy the gift of life.

And now Paul turns his attention to the affluent (that would be us). To enjoy life, Paul says (verse 18), you need to do good—be rich in good works, ready to share. The responsibility is to “take hold of the life that is really life.” That’s the real issue here—not pledges and church budgets, but life that is really life.

What we do with our money – and giving it – can be seen as an act of resistance in a consumer culture. Reimagine generosity as an act of taking a stand against anything or anyone other than the Holy One telling you who and whose you are. It is one way we respond to God’s amazing love and grace.