



April 6, 2008
Study Guide & Daily Readings
(First in Series: Milestones)

Laying a Good Foundation

Joshua 4:4-7

Joshua is an epic of conquest and a testimony to faith. Beginning where Deuteronomy ends it narrates how, under the leadership of Joshua and the protection of Yahweh, Israel entered Canaan and there carved out a place for itself.

The story begins with the dramatic crossing of the Jordan River. Joshua's army is led by the Ark of the Covenant which holds the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Ark was thought to have supernatural powers protecting the Hebrews in battles where they were often outnumbered. The waters of the river are cut off to allow the people to pass on dry ground. Following the crossing, Joshua commands someone from each tribe to set up a twelve stone monument to remind the people of this miraculous act.

Joshua has seen before how quickly the people tend to forget how God works in history. With the building of the monument, whenever Israel faced trouble, this memorial would cause them to look to the same God who would deliver them again. All believers should set up in their hearts "stones of remembrance" of what God has done in the past. Then, when trouble overtakes them, they can renew their confidence in God.

II Corinthians 9:6-15 - Sowing Good Seed

We have been blessed to be a blessing. The more we offer ourselves as a blessing for others, the more we make ourselves available for God's blessings.

This passage speaks directly to an offering Paul is collecting for the church at Jerusalem. While he is speaking to financial giving, the agricultural metaphor applies to all life. *"The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."* The scripture reminds us, as it did the church at Corinth, that what we do with our lives matters.

The Spiritual Law of Multiplication

The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (Verse 6)

Further, this passage refers to the spiritual aspects of being involved with what God is doing in the world. Like the seed that returns several fold, our commitment to God also returns several fold financially, emotionally, physically, relationally, and spiritually.

The Cheerful Giver

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves the cheerful giver. (Verse 7)

Here Paul refers to the importance of our attitude in service and giving. The condition of the heart is as important as the time, talent, service, and offering given.

Sharing the Harvest

That you may share abundantly in every good work. (Verse 8)

God is active in our world. By participating in the ministries of the church through giving, we become partners with God. This partnership overflows into every area of our lives as we seek to follow God in all things.

An Act of Faith

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity. (Verse 11)

We see sharing as an act of subtraction. On the surface, we are diminished by our offering and sacrifice. The opposite is true. As we sacrifice we are given an even greater capacity to sacrifice in the future.

Overflowing from God

Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift! (Verse 15)

Paul sees "sharing" as an opportunity to increase God's blessing. As the old saying proclaims, "You can't out give God!"

Daily Readings

Please note: As we approach the 25th anniversary and the opportunity to support our Growing in Faith campaign, these readings will help you reflect on your own life and commitment. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, April 7 – Read *Matthew 6: 24*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals with the issue of divided loyalties. How do we make our decisions? Look at your checkbook and see what priorities and loyalties are reflected there. Where is God?

Tuesday, April 8 – Read *Malachi Chapter 3*

These are difficult words. The prophet Malachi spares no feelings in talking about gifts. All that we have belongs to God. For Malachi, to withhold our gifts is an act of disobedience comparable to stealing from God. On the other hand, to give is to see the windows of heaven open for even more abundance. How have you seen the working of God's abundance in your life? Are there areas where you might be stealing from God? Would you be comfortable hearing a sermon on this topic?

Wednesday, April 9 – Read *Mark 12:41-44*

One of the more famous stories in the Bible is about the widow's mite. While teaching, Jesus recognizes the widow who gave out of her poverty to the work of the Temple. This story illustrates that the importance of giving is not in the amount of the gift, but rather the amount of the sacrifice. Further, the emphasis is on the need of the giver and not the need of the church. Are you giving out of what is left over? Or does your giving cause a strain in your life style? Are you looking at the needs of the church or your capacity to give?

Thursday, April 10 – Read *Matthew 22: 15-22*

Rending unto Caesar is a big deal in our society. Between sales tax, property tax, gas tax, and income tax, the average citizen of the United States pays 30% of their income on different taxes. What do you estimate your total taxes to be? How does it compare to your giving to the church?

Friday, April 11 – Read *II Corinthians 8: 1-8*

Paul uses the church at Macedonia as an example of generosity and giving. Macedonia is the poorest of the churches. It is no Highland Park or even Flower Mound. Macedonia is praised for its complete sacrifice and commitment to the work of ministry. How would you grade Trietsch Memorial UMC?