

Daily Readings

Please note: In a culture of fear these readings will help you reflect on your own life and commitment. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

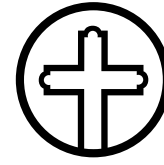
Monday, October 13 – Read *Matthew 6:25-34*. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals with the issues of anxiety, worry, and fear. He challenges his disciples to “seek first the Kingdom of God”. What kingdoms are you serving in your life right now? How can you best seek first God’s Kingdom?

Tuesday, October 14 – 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 like to hear a sermon on this?

Wednesday, October 15 – Read *Mark 12:41-44*. Guilt is a common emotion when talking about giving and generosity. God does not look at the gift, but at the heart and intent. The measurements of the world do not exist in God’s Kingdom. We have all heard the story of 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. Are you giving out of what is left over?

Thursday, October 16 – Read *Matthew 22:15-22*. Rendering 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, October 17 – 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?



TRIETSCH

October 12, 2008
Study Guide & Daily Readings

Fields of Gold Week 1 of 3

“Sowing the Seeds in a Culture of Fear”

1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...

The Word from the Bible New Revised Standard Version

The past few weeks have been frightening for most of us. The national media is comparing the current financial crisis to the Great Depression. History teaches us that the 1930s were marked with massive unemployment and a world-wide political, social and economic meltdown that resulted in the circumstances that led to World War II.

We all have been tempted to play the “*what if?*” game. “What if I lose my job? What if my retirement goes away? What if my bank goes broke? What if I can’t pay my mortgage? What if...?”

The Bible addresses the issues of anxiety and fear head-on. We are called to fear God and nothing else. As followers of Christ, our confidence is in the Lord of all creation. Fear is a faith issue.

In the disciple John’s first letter, he addresses the issue of fear while talking about the love of God. **“Dear friends let us love one another, for love comes from God.”** (1 John 4:7) John then goes on to address fear directly by writing, **“There is no fear in love. Perfect love drives out fear...”** (1 John 4:18)

John knows that when we are fearful, we tend to retreat from life. We become self-concerned and overcome by the need to protect what we have. Jesus calls us to a higher life as quoted in *Matthew 6:33* **“Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.”**

Andy Stanley, author of *Fields of Gold* and pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta says this in his book, “A little fear can be healthy, but it can also be dangerous. It has the power to make you act contrary to your beliefs. In essence, it can make you irrational.”

The Joy of Giving

In a culture of fear, it is difficult to talk about giving, much less radical generosity or sacrificial sharing. Yet we know from history that great per capita giving has always taken place in the leanest years. For example, in the 20th century the largest per capita giving year was 1932 – at the height of the Great Depression!

No other subject in the church today makes people more uncomfortable than “money.” On the one hand there are those that feel the church talks too much about money. While others feel that the church does not talk enough about the blessings of giving.

On the one hand, the church and our pastors deal with the deepest spiritual and emotional needs of our lives. Yet we often see any talk about money (which often is at the core of our decision making) as a compromise to the purity of that purpose. The church's ministry is dependent upon the generosity of its members. The work of the church and the fundamental sacred mission of the church are dependent on this generosity.

When we look at the biblical content, we find more on the subject of giving than any other subject. A review of these passages reveals a critical pattern to the handling of money, spiritual health and faith. When we give faithfully, we are reminded that the spiritual and the physical are connected. When we give, we are reminded of our dependence on God. When we give, our faith grows and our sense of having to control all things diminishes, because we know all things are under the control of God. When we give generously, faith — not fear — rules our lives.

An Abundant Harvest

II Corinthians 9:6-12

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor, his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

True Generosity Comes from the Heart

In II Corinthians 9:6-7, the apostle Paul uses the harvest image to speak to the spiritual law of multiplication. He writes, ***"The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."***

As fully developing disciples of Jesus Christ, we are blessed in order to be a blessing. God gives us the financial resources, spiritual gifts and talents to build God's Kingdom. These resources and gifts are to be used for God's glory, not put on a shelf. As we use them for God's glory, they multiply and grow. The opposite can also be said – if we don't use them, we lose them.

From the proverbial wisdom of his people, Paul draws the conviction that a truly generous person receives in return gifts from God and other people out of proportion to one's own giving. He quotes from *Proverbs 22:8* claiming God loves a cheerful giver. Verse 9 is quoted from *Psalms 112:9*.

The modern reader may not respond well to the reward-punishment aspect of these writings. But the biblical writers do not hesitate to employ the sanctions of reward and punishment in moral exhortations. Nevertheless, Paul insists that true generosity arises from a free heart that

forgets the reward-punishment promise and gives out of a grateful heart. In his judgment, every blessing, literally ***"all grace of God in Christ,"*** or ***"every grace of God in Christ,"*** is given without regard for how much we deserve. For Paul, the motive for Christian generosity and response comes out of gratitude.

Dr. D. James Kennedy

D. James Kennedy tells a story of a man who came to Peter Marshall, former chaplain of the United States Senate, with a concern about tithing. He said: "I have a problem. I have been tithing for some time. It wasn't too bad when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give the \$2,000. But you see, now I am making \$500,000, and there is just no way I can afford to give away \$50,000 a year."

Dr. Marshall reflected on this wealthy man's dilemma but gave no advice. He simply said: "Yes, sir. I see that you do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about it. Is that alright?"

The man agreed, so Dr. Marshall bowed his head and prayed with boldness and authority. "Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will help him. Lord, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe."

Discussion Questions

*(The following questions were posted on the Generous Giving web site — www.generousgiving.org — to be used with the book *Fields of Gold* by Andy Stanley)*

1. How does fear inhibit our ability to give? How might addressing fear free us for the task of giving?
2. What are some of the biggest "what ifs" in life that seems to make giving impossible?
3. Read *II Corinthians 9*. What promises does God give to the believer in order to comfort fear and inspire generosity?
4. Why does the believer need to submit his finances to God's control if he wishes to become generous?
5. How do the four P's of giving (priority giving, percentage giving, progressive giving and prompted giving) encourage us to be generous in all areas of our being (heart, mind, strength and soul)?
6. What are the benefits of following a giving plan?
7. Is fear necessarily a bad motive for giving? If not, what are some good fears to prompt giving?
8. How is fear related to joy in giving?
9. How does an eternal perspective change our attitude toward money?
10. How does realizing that the money we give away is not really ours change our attitude toward giving?