*DEVOTIONAL*

October 9 - 14

*Stewardship: First Things First*

**Monday, October 9 2 Corinthians 8:1-7**

 *“They gave themselves first to the Lord”*

 Few people are more attractive or more contagious than those individuals who find happiness in generosity. It is unfortunate that so many of us seem to find it hard to associate the two words “enjoyment” and “giving.” Because ours is a society that is preoccupied with getting, we often fail to experience personally the truth of Christ’s words: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul gives us insight into both the motivation for and method of giving that can by joyful.

 Paul tells us that joyful giving flows from the gift of self: “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” A missionary was talking with the chief of a primitive tribe. The chief tried to impress the missionary with gifts of animal skins and precious stones. But the missionary said, “My God does not want the chief’s animal skins or precious stones. My God want the chief himself.” Then the chief smiled and said, “You have a very wise God, for when I give him myself he also gets animal skins and precious stones.”

*Lord, I give you myself. Show me what to give to your kingdom. Amen.*

**Tuesday, October 10 Matthew 6:25-34**

*“Make the kingdom of God your primary concern”*

 Jesus’ call to trust God addresses the human tendency to worry. We find it easier to feel secure when we have things that we control and, when something is beyond our control, we worry. But, when we have found the greater security in God, we can trust him for all our needs. Christ calls us to give up our limited securities for greater security in his grace when he uses the birds of the air to illustrate freedom from anxiety, and the lilies of the field to illustrate freedom from status-seeking.

 The basis of our trust is confidence in the King. We believe that he is the primary mover in the world, and we trust he will provide. When we are truly Kingdom members, having been born into his Kingdom by the Holy Spirit, it follows that our highest purpose is “the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.” This concentration on doing God’s will is the positive answer to worry, but it is also and primarily a direction for positive action as a lifestyle.

*God who rules heaven and earth, I commit myself to your priorities. Amen.*

**Wednesday, October 11 Romans 15:1-4**

*“Not to please ourselves . . . Christ did not please himself”*

 All of us have the inbuilt desire to please ourselves. This quite naturally leads to all kinds of selfishness and independence which are responsible for many ills experienced in the body of Christ. The Christian is called to have a renewed mind (Romans 12:2), a mind no longer conformed to the selfish patterns of this world but transformed to follow God’s will which includes the development of a ministering-to-the-needs-of-others mentality.

 Thus, says Paul, it is the strong in Christ who are willing to voluntarily and sacrificially set aside those things that please themselves when, by doing so, they are able to meet the needs of a neighbor. To make such a decision and to adopt such an attitude requires spiritual maturity. This comes from two sources. First, there is the understanding that Christian life in the community of the church involves support for the building up of the kingdom ministry of the church. Second, there has to be a desire to give the glory to God. There is little that brings honor to the Lord in the actions of a self-centered Christian.

*Selfless Christ, I commit to pleasing you with the decisions I make. Amen.*

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October 9 - 14

*Stewardship: First Things First*

**Thursday, October 12 1 Chronicles 29:10-16**

*“Everything we have has come from you”*

 David offers a prayer of thanks to God for enabling him to complete the necessary preparations to build the temple. First, he offers praise to God in general terms for his greatness and faithfulness as Creator (vv. 10-12). Then, David expresses the gratitude of all the people using the collective “we” (v. 13). The prayer next points out the nation’s past experience of God’s gracious help in their time of need, and how all that they have is a gift from God. Therefore, how can they claim any glory for giving back to God what he has given them (v. 14)?

 The expression “aliens and strangers” (v. 15) is used to remind the people of the wanderings of their patriarchs and matriarchs in the wilderness, and their status as slaves in Egypt. They had no rights and were utterly dependent on God for their security and physical well-being. David returns to the temple construction materials (v. 16) and reiterates that their availability is due to God’s graciousness and goodness.

*Lord, I worship you as the God who provides me with all that is good. Amen.*

**Friday, October 13 1 Corinthians 16:1-4**

*“Now about the collection for God’s people”*

 Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians reached its highest peak with his discussion of the hope of life beyond the grave and of the nature of resurrection life in chapter 15. In this closing chapter the mood changes as he attends to what would be called today a few “housekeeping matters.” That he would put his discussion of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the offering for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem so close together without any sense of inappropriateness shows us the comprehensiveness of Paul’s message.

 While these are not rules or commandments to be adhered to with legalistic rigidity, they contain great wisdom and insight on the matter of Christian charity. Everyone should be involved in the offering whether they had little or much to give. The system Paul suggested was that each week as they met to worship, they add to the offering. This giving should reflect each member’s own circumstances. He closed his brief comments by saying that there should be careful administration of the money that was raised.

*Dear Jesus, when I give to your ministry I will grow in my love for you. Amen.*

**Saturday, October 14 Genesis 28:16-22**

*“I will give God a tenth of everything he gives me”*

 One of the most familiar stories of Jacob is the account of his dream at Bethel. In the dream he sees a ladder or stairway that reaches to heaven upon which the messengers of God travel between the heavenly and earthly realms. God himself speaks the words of the covenant blessing, a blessing already given to Jacob’s father Isaac and grandfather Abraham, of promised land and descendants.

 When Jacob awakes, he recognizes the holiness of the place by setting up a stone pillar and naming it Bethel, meaning “house of God.” Then, he makes a personal vow. Vows are promises made with conditions attached. Here the conditions include provision and protection from God that will result in Jacob’s return to Bethel to worship God, and a tithe (ten percent) of “all that you give me.” While there were times in the ancient world that the tithe was required, such as giving tribute to a king, Jacob’s tithe is clearly a voluntary response to God’s blessing his life.

*My God, you have blessed me richly. May I be a blessing to others. Amen.*