

Today, we continue our sermon series “On Earth as it is in Heaven.” As noted in the past three weeks, the phrase “On Earth as it is in Heaven” comes from the Lord’s Prayer, complementing Jesus’s petition of “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.” When we pray these words, we are not just hoping for a distant future but calling for God’s goodwill to be done here and now. By asking, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we ask God’s rule to manifest in every aspect of our existence.

Over the past weeks, we have explored the themes of presence, prayer, and service, learning how we experience heavenly manifestations when we show up, serve, and pray. Now, we examine the vital role of giving as an act just as crucial to our spiritual lives.

The Bible makes clear that generosity is a character trait of God and his kingdom. The apostle Paul said this in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “God loves a cheerful giver” because God is a cheerful giver himself. We just have to look at Jesus’s life and what he did for so many people to help them experience God’s goodness and love. He emptied himself for our sake.

Let’s start by defining what we mean by “giving” as a stewardship practice. In the biblical sense, giving encompasses our skills, talents, and financial resources utilized to support and advance the church’s mission. This mission, as Jesus articulated before ascending to Heaven, involves making disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey everything he commanded us,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

This is the mission of the church, which makes it our mission. This is not about an institution but about us as believers and followers of Jesus who want to share with others the goodness of God, Jesus’ love, and grace for all people. We participate in this mission by gathering, serving, and praying as people of faith, but also through giving. When we give, whether through time, talents, or finances, we participate in a divine cycle of blessing that extends beyond ourselves. It is not just about keeping the church’s doors open; it is about expanding the reach of God’s kingdom so that others might experience God’s love and provision.

So, when we ask the question, “Why do we give?” the answer is that we are on a mission with Jesus to continue to carry on with his work of bringing hope and encouragement to the world, making Heaven a tangible experience here on Earth.

But what does this look like when you receive and give? What is precisely accomplished when we partner with God on Jesus’ mission? Let’s consider the example of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:10-20. Think of this as a case study,

“I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of

being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Who among you writes “Thank You” notes? Congratulations—you are a better person than me! Writing “Thank You” notes is wonderful, and I wish I had better practice doing it. This is what the apostle is doing here, writing a “Thank You” note to the church in Philippi.

By reading this portion of the letter, you would not know he was writing from a cold jail cell, chained to a Roman soldier, as if he were a violent criminal. In the last five years, he was arrested for preaching the gospel, held captive unjustly, shipwrecked, stranded on an island, and under house arrest awaiting trial before the heinous Caesar Nero. It would have been understandable if he had become a cynic, bitter, and resentful person. Instead of writing a “Thank you” note, he would have written an extensive complaint letter. He probably would have taken his grievances to Facebook if he had lived nowadays. But he wrote a “Thank you” note where he expressed his joy, contentment, and strength because of his faith and the generosity of the Philippians.

This is a profound example of why we give and the power of giving. While confined in a cold, dark jail cell, treated unjustly, and bound in chains, Paul experienced a touch of Heaven through the kindness of the Philippians. Their consistent support met his physical needs and uplifted his spirit, reinforcing his faith and resolve. This act of generosity transformed his prison cell into a place of fellowship and grace, showing that the environment around us can be transcended by the love and support we receive from the body of Christ. As Paul experienced the tangible support of the Philippians, his ministry was sustained and empowered even in the midst of hardship. Similarly, the Philippians were blessed by growing their faith and understanding of God’s providence. This is the cycle of blessings when we give according to God’s purpose.

Do you remember when someone was generous to you and when you were generous to another person? What did that make you feel, as a recipient and giver? How did it change theirs and your life? It most likely provided for your needs and made you aware that you are not alone and that people care. It made you all happy and grateful. That is because a giving person is happier, healthier, and more satisfied than a greedy and meager person. And a person who is blessed as a receiver experiences the same kind of bliss and satisfaction. In other words, giving makes everyone happy!

Nevertheless, giving is not a natural inclination or an intuitive choice, as any selfless act comes at a personal cost. When we do something for someone else, we may give away some of

our personal resources, such as time, energy, or money, and often we are unwilling to do that. This struggle stems largely from our inherent tendencies towards self-preservation and accumulation. When we give, we are making a conscious choice to prioritize the needs of others over our own immediate desires or comforts. This is not to say that we should be careless about managing our resources and give everything away mindlessly. This would not be good stewardship but reckless actions.

So, we need to learn how we give. First, giving is not a theoretical sacrifice but a tangible one. Dedicating time to volunteer or mentor others can mean less leisure time. Donating money might require tightening the budget elsewhere. Contributing energy to community service might come at the expense of personal relaxation or pursuing hobbies. These are real trade-offs that people face when making the decision to give a significant commitment.

And second, in addition to these practical considerations, there is also the emotional aspect of giving. It requires vulnerability and trust—trust that our contributions are going to be used effectively and that our sacrifices are worthwhile. This can be especially difficult if past experiences of giving have not been positive.

The key is to know why we give. And I have seen our church knows this well. When the United Methodist Men raised money to build a ramp for Scott Robertsson last year, that was giving. When Bill Hindman and Charlie Conrad helped Zack Batiste, week after week, come to church for Bible study and worship, that was giving. When the Bible Babes make hats for kids, host meals for teachers, and do many other things that is giving. When we collect food, toys, school supplies and uniforms for children in the community, that is giving. We have been recipients of the blessing but also givers of many more.

When I was a kid, I was blessed by people like the Philippians and the apostle Paul, as well as people like this church. Because of the church, I grew up in a healthy environment and became a good, honest man. Because of the church, I met my wife, who shares my faith and loves God as I do, and with whom I also have our beautiful children who also love God. Because of the church, I have so many significant relationships with people. Because of the church, I made good decisions in my life and overcame the times when I did not or was going through a difficult time. Because of the church, I found my calling in life. And many other reasons and blessings.

I would not be the person I am or be where I am today without people giving themselves to serve God. If people had not given to the church back when I was kid, I would not have had a church, and my life would have turned out in a different way. I know this is true for all of you, too. That is the value of giving and being on a mission together as a church. The wonderful things that happen when we give are all of you here and those who will believe because of your witness as you pass your faith to them.

In conclusion, the transformative power of giving—whether of our time, talents, or financial resources—extends far beyond the act itself. It becomes a profound expression of our faith and our commitment to the mission of Christ. By giving, we do more than support the church; we actively participate in the divine economy, where generosity is currency and the

returns are measured in transformed lives, strengthened communities, and the deep satisfaction that comes from acting in accordance with God's generous nature.

Here is the good news and our invitation today: Embrace the call to be generous with your skills, time, energy, and money. Reflect on the impact that giving has had in your life and how it has shaped you. Consider how you might give—not out of obligation but from a desire to participate in God's work in the world. Give others what you want yourself. If you crave kindness, then give it. If you need hope, then give hope generously everywhere you go. If the work of the church has blessed you, then support it as the Philippians supported Paul.

And let's step into this week with a resolve to give, not to count the cost but to realize the blessing. As we do, we will surely see that we make a life through what we give.