

September 9, 2016
Stewardship is a Choice
#4. Count your Blessings
Scripture: 2 King 4:1-7, Galatians 6:7-8, Luke 6:38

What do you count? Do you count your troubles and go around with a long face muttering to yourself, "Woe is me"? Do you count all the negative things that have happened to you in your life? Do you look at other people with envy and just wish you could be like them, or have what they have? What do you count?

Or do you count your blessings? Are you thankful you live in Canada with all of its rights and freedoms? Are you thankful for the natural resources God has blessed us with that underpin our economy? Are you thankful for our standard of living, for our social programs and safety nets and for our educational and health care systems? Are you thankful for the fact that our country is both strong and free? Are you thankful for your family, your church family, your friendships, and for this community in which we live? What do you count?

Now, of course, our country, and our community are not problem free. No country or community is. And we all have our personal problems. Everyone does. But do we truly understand just how blessed we are as Canadians? Are we really thankful or do we tend to take our blessings for granted?

This is the final message in our four part series called "Stewardship is a Choice" where we have focused on learning to be good managers, or stewards, of the blessings God has given us. Here's an important teaching from Jesus as we count our blessings. Luke 6:38 (NIV):

³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you.

Jesus tells us here that it's OUR standard of measurement, not his, that determines what we get back in EVERY area of our lives. That what we receive in life will be greatly determined by what we give in life.

Let's talk about friendship. What's the difference between a close friendship and a casual acquaintance? A close friend is someone you have invested your time and effort into. You have found things you share in common. You enjoy each other's company. You know each other's heart.

But a casual acquaintance is when you just know someone by name. It's someone you just run into now and then, or do business with. You have no intention of taking that relationship to another level. Whether someone becomes a friend or remains an acquaintance depends on what you put into the relationship. As Jesus said:

"For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."

Or let's put this stewardship principle another way. The Bible also says in Galatians 6:7-8:

Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.
(Msg)

Think about that? If you plant tomatoes in your garden, you wouldn't expect to harvest lettuce! If you planted sunflower seeds, you wouldn't expect to see roses appear. If you didn't plant anything at seedtime and expected a bountiful harvest of anything but weeds, you'd be a fool. In the spiritual realm, if you live in sin you'll die in sin. If you live by faith in God through Jesus Christ, you will live eternally. It's a spiritual principle. It applies to all of life.

"For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."

Let's put that in the context of faith. In Matthew Chapter 9:27-30 there is the story of two blind men who came to Jesus for healing.

27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. 29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; 30 and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this."

Did you get that? ***"According to YOUR faith let it be done to you"***
That's why faith is so important.

And let's remember that Jesus says that faith can be measured. He spoke about people having "little" faith and "great" faith and "no" faith. He qualified faith by saying. **"IF you have faith you can..."**, and he said, **"WITHOUT faith you cannot...."** We're even told that he performed no miracles in his hometown of Nazareth because he found "NO" faith there.

"For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."

Let's apply that same principle to our needs. Second Kings Chapter 4 tells the story of a widow who was deeply in debt and her creditors were about to take her sons into slavery to cover their losses.

4 The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves." 2 Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a small jar of olive oil." 3 Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. DON'T ASK FOR JUST A FEW. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side."

Did you hear that instruction? When you ask your neighbours for some empty jars, ***"Don't ask for just a few"*** Why? Because the number of empty jars will determine the size of the return. If you just ask for 2-3 empty jars, you'll only get a miracle that fits that amount. So ask for more! ***"For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."*** Here's how the story ends.

5 She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left" then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."

There's our stewardship principal again. ***"For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."***

The same principle works in our relationships. Listen to Jesus again. Matthew 6:14-15:

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Why is that? ***"For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."***

The same principle is true of the biblical teaching on tithing; that is of giving 10% of your income to God's work. Malachi 3:8-11.

8 "Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! "But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' "You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. 9 You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! 11 Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

As Jesus taught us:

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure YOU use, it will be measured to you."

So let's go back to the question we started with. What do you count? Your blessings or your troubles? That is the ultimate management question. The ultimate stewardship question. Because what you count in life is always a choice and it is the measure that you use, that God will use to determine his blessings to you. What you count, what you choose to do with the things God has given you – with your time, your talents and your treasures – will not only be an expression of your gratitude to God, but it will also determine the return. So count your blessings!

PASTORAL PRAYER

Creator God,

It is easy for us to be thankful on a weekend dedicated to that theme.

It is much harder for us to remember to be thankful each and every day of our lives.

It is easy for us to think of our blessings as something we have inherited, worked for, or deserve.

It is much harder for us to remember that ultimately You, O God, are the source of all our blessings.

It is much easier for us to think of all we have as our right and to become selfish and protective of "our" stuff.

It is much harder for us to think of these things as a privilege and a blessing to be shared with others.

Generous God, help us to remember that you have placed us in a country richly blessed with majestic beauty, rich crop producing soil, and abundant natural resources.

Help us to remember that we live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world with one of the highest standards of living.

Help us also to remember that when we were lost in our sin, Jesus died for us that we might be reconciled to you.

May our gratitude be shown in the way we live our lives, in the way we express our faith, and in the way we minister to the needs of others.

This Thanksgiving season make us particularly mindful of the hungry, the lonely, the poor, and those for whom life is hard and thanksgiving is difficult.

All this we pray, in Jesus Name. Amen.