

Listen, I love this little preview to Christmas here. Loving the fact that the Christmas decorations got put up and I didn't have to help. I. Listen, last, last Sunday afternoon when we were in the hospital, the only blessing that I could count on my hand was the fact that someone else was putting up trees. It was counterbalanced by the just sadness that I missed casserole Sunday.

I'm really sad about that, but there'll be more. So that's. That's something to look forward to. These Christmas decorations always excite a little joy in me. But there's.

In the. Off in the distance, there's a shadow pointing that I know is there, just sort of hanging over me, and that is that New Year's is coming. And what do we always do at New Year's? We make resolutions. How many of you guys have given up on those?

A long time ago, unapologetically, you said, I'm done with resolutions. Listen, I try to, but there's a little part of me that always thinks, should I at least put a little bit of effort into becoming a better person? For years, my, my yearly, my yearly resolution was, I'm going to get better about this discipleship, this discipleship pattern. I'm going to get good discipleship habits going. I'm going to get up early in the morning.

I'm going to get my coffee. I'm going to open my Bible. I'm going to read it. I'm going to get just wonderful, wonderful gleanings from God's word. It's going to give me the insight and the wisdom.

Just tackle any that comes down the pike. That's going to be good. And I'll tell you, I do pretty good until about January 3rd. And then, and then I stay up too late and the alarm goes off. And you hit snooze, and then you hit snooze again.

And then you hit snooze again. And you hit snooze again. And you look at your clock go, oh, I gotta go. I gotta get up. I gotta get up.

I gotta go. So you're knocking down a cup of coffee, you're running out the door, you're trying to listen to Caleb to get some sort of, you know, devotion going on in the morning. Am I the only one that struggles with early morning devotions? If that's you, can you just say it's me? But I don't like to admit it.

Okay, okay, we're all there. Now listen, establishing those habits was hard until almost a little over two years ago. Now I'm trying to figure out where we're at with this because it feels like in one sense that I've had these young men in my life forever and, and others like it just happened two weeks ago. So about a little over two years ago, something happened. These two kids showed up on life, and all of a sudden it wasn't just me having to get up and get myself ready.

There were others that had to be gotten up, and they have a harder time waking up than I do. And there was this chaotic rush to find your pants and get the shoes. Where did you put your shoes? Where's my Chromebook? And they would look at me and ask me these questions with a slight accusatory tone, like I was hiding their Chromebook just to make life hard.

So it became not just a desire to get up early and have some quiet time with Jesus. It became a necessity. And so I developed a few little habits. One, set the alarm clock earlier than I want to. 5:30.

And then the second part of that is get your feet on the floor and get out of bed. You know what, you know, it's fine to set an alarm clock, but if you don't follow through on the alarm, it does absolutely no good. Now, the rest of it seem to follow pretty easily. Once I'm up, the coffee is pretty easy to make. Once I'm up, finding a nice comfortable place to sit and opening up my Bible or my phone app.

My Bible applies, though, that's pretty easy to do. That just sort of followed in line. So why do I talk about this? Well, we're finishing up this week on a financial series that we've called open handed. Now, if you're here visiting for the first time, know this and these guys will attest to it.

We do not talk about money all the time. Can you just say, you're right, Tim? We don't talk about money all the time. We really don't. But Jesus talked about it a lot, so we feel like we got to address it every once in a while.

So here we want to be generous people. This is who Jesus has called us to be. And I will tell you, this church is incredibly generous. We give really well to the things that happen periodically. And we've had some pretty big ask.

And you guys hear about a need. It's inspiring. And, and you, and you give out. You give out of abundance. And it's.

That's amazing. But giving periodically is different than being a steward of Jesus's resources. Being a steward means that I, my character is such that I don't just sort of give when my heartstrings are pulled, but I give as just a matter of course. That's who I am. I'm a giving.

I'm a generous person. And Jesus wants us to be generous people. So that, that, that requires developing habits and nurturing those habits that help us do that. So today we're going to be looking at some of those habits that I think I found make it easier for me. I am still on this journey.

You're not looking at someone who's got this all figured out. I'm

still figuring this out myself. But I'm going to share with you what I know, because every little bit helps, right? Heavenly Father, today as we open your word, we want to be faithful with your grace. We want to be good stewards of your salvation, of the, of the tremendous gifts that you have given us, beginning with your love for us, beginning with Jesus.

And then beyond that, just the ways that time and time, over and over, above and beyond you, bless our lives. We want to be good stewards of that. In Jesus name, amen. I mentioned that word steward, I noticed in my prayer time. And for those of us who don't know what that is, a steward is merely.

Is merely someone who handles someone else's stuff. If you've ever babysat as a teen teenager, then you were stewarding children while they were in your care. They're not your kids, thankfully, but, but you were in charge of them and you were responsible for them. You took on the role of stewardship. Here at Sherwood Oaks, we have this idea that we, we believe comes straight from God's word, that God owns everything and that we are.

We're just stewards. All of my stuff really is God's stuff, and so I use it knowing that he's actually in charge of it all. Now we can be good stewards. Many of you know the story of Joseph. Joseph had a lot of hard stuff happen in his life, but he was faithful to God.

And, and as God moved him along, God put him in charge of different things. And he was, he first managed his master's wealth, and then because he did that well, he was a good steward. God entrusted him with the wealth of the nation of Egypt. And through his good stewardship, millions of people's lives were, were, were saved during a time of famine. We can be a good steward or we can be a bad steward.

Jesus has a couple of parables about stewards who, who hoarded resources out of fear, anxiety, and in the end lost everything. So we want to be good stewards. We want to be people who manage God's resources well. As I said, I'm not, I'm not perfect at this yet, but, but here's a few things that I've learned. So we're going to read through some scriptures that I think inform some of these habits that are good habits to just, to just get into.

So if you've got your Bibles and you want to go ahead and turn to second Corinthians, there are two Corinthians in the Bible. There's First Corinthians and there's Second Corinthians, and the Second Corinthians is the one where we want to be at. So if you've got your Bibles or your Bible app, you can go ahead and open that up. If you don't have either, we will have the Scriptures up here on the, on the front. But I always like to have something in front of me so I can make a note or underline something if it's, if it jumps out.

So here's The Background to Second Corinthians, Chapter 9. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Now, these are the first ones. These are the ones, the Jews are the first ones who received the, the news of Jesus Christ. These are the ones who met Jesus personally oftentimes and knew what he had done.

And they become Christians and are living right there in Jerusalem. But they're going through a rough time economically. It is devastating. In Jerusalem, they had some famine. There's also some persecution going on.

And so Paul, the Apostle Paul, who's, who's going all over the, the known world at the time he's preaching, he's, he's. People are becoming Christians. There's forming new churches. And so Paul is inviting these other churches, Gentiles, meaning there weren't Jews, they were Gentiles to, to step up and help the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. This is something that we're doing with our gratitude offering through the month of November and in December, we're, we're using our extra to help other people who need it.

So the Corinthians church said, yeah, we really want to do this. We want to help our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. And this is where Paul, Paul addresses some of this on the backside. So Second Corinthians, chapter nine. And we're going to start in verse two.

Paul says, for I know your eagerness to help, and I've been boasting about it to the Macedonians, other Christians in other areas, telling them that since last year, you and Achaia were ready to give. And your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. Your. Your enthusiasm stirred their enthusiasm. But Paul says, I'm sending the brothers in order that are boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready.

Because it's one thing to talk a good game, it's another thing to follow through. Right? Paul says, I don't want you guys to be embarrassed, so I want you to be ready. For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we. Not to say anything about you would be ashamed of having been so confident.

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given. You might underline grudgingly given if you've got a Bible that you underline in because that'll come up later. The. The value of preparing emotionally to give in order to do so with joy.

This is what Paul's talking about here. Says, I want you to be ready to give so that when it's time to give, you can do it and you can do it with enthusiasm. So let's keep going. Verse. I think verse six.

Here he encourages their generosity. He says, remember this. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give.

There's good stuff here, kids. If something's picking out at you or sticking out, you just underline it. Each of you should give what you've decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work as it is written.

He quotes the Old Testament. Here they freely scatter their gifts to the poor. Their righteousness endures forever. Paul says, giving is a righteous act. So verse 10.

Now, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. And you will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. And through us, your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. That's a lot of scripture there, but there's a lot of good stuff. So as they're preparing to give, Paul takes the opportunity to lay out several key principles of generosity and he, and he outlined them through there principles that will, I believe, help establish habits of generous stewardship.

The first one is found in verse 15. Generous people are grateful. They're grateful for God's generosity to them. Generous people have some consistency in their giving. They have financial habits that imply continuity.

They're intentional. Verse 5 talks about deciding and determining beforehand what you're going to do and how much you're going to give. And, and this prepares our emotions to, to take action. Because impetuosity, that's a big word that just means acting without thinking too much about it beforehand. Impetuosity can oftentimes breed regret.

And Paul says that's not what we want in our giving. And then he says, I want you to be confident. Verses 8 through 10 he says, God's able to take care of you. God's able to supply. So let's just walk through these.

The first habit of generous stewardship is just the habit of gratitude. For most of these Gentile Christians, giving in the Gentile world, in the Roman Greco Roman world, as a response to gratitude might have been a relatively foreign concept. Most of them gave those who had the means to do so to others. Gave as an act of patronage. You gave and, but you got something in return.

Maybe a special position, maybe your name on a big coliseum. You know, you gave, but you got something back. But to give just as an act of worship and a trust in God and as an act of gratitude, well, that was sort of a new thing. Paul says people with habits of generosity are the kind of people who are continually amazed by the grace of God. To me, gratitude is, is, is perhaps the keystone to emotional, mental, spiritual well being.

To be grateful for what God has done in our lives. Most of us walk around oblivious to the blessings of God that we only notice when they're not there anymore. Am I? You hear what I'm saying? And then we're like, oh, that was great.

Why I missed that. Let's be thankful for it right now. People who are grateful tend to be content with what God has trusted to them because they've received so much. When they begin to add up their blessings, they're like, oh my word. We live in the goodness of God.

We've received the salvation of Jesus in this life and in the life to come and everything beyond that is just like extra icing on the cake in First Corinthians. We're in Second Corinthians now. But in First Corinthians, chapter 16, Paul writes about this Paul writes about the Gospel and the grace and the certainty of hope that we have in the resurrection and the promise of eternal life. And he says, death is swallowed up in victory. We don't have to worry about death anymore.

Where is your. Where is your victory, death? Where is your sting? Instead, Paul says, thanks be to God. He has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we consider the grace of God, to us, everything else is just extra. So what do we do with all that extra blessing in our life? Well, we extend it to others. We are like our Father. We.

We give freely out of the abundance God has given to us. Because if we look at chapter 15 in First Corinthians and then we go to the very next chapter, verse 16, Paul talks about this. He says, because of. Because of what we received in Christ, we can be generous with others. And this is where he first mentions the challenge that the Christians in Jerusalem were first facing.

He says, man, if you're continually amazed by God's grace, you want to share it with others. Look, he says, God has provided seed for the sower. He's provided bread for food. A couple weeks ago, I mentioned one of my favorite little toys, the leaf blower. God has provided resources to get that leaf blower.

Tim. He has blessed you abundantly. Are you grateful? Then express that gratitude by being generous. And then watch him.

Watch him increase, enlarge, enrich your life as you nurture the habit. Gratitude. So that gratitude is our first habit that we want to. We want to. We want to build our lives around.

But the second is just consistency. Now, the habit of consistency sounds a little bit redundant. Those words sort of both mean the same thing. But consistent generosity is important. One, it creates regularity in our financial lives, in our budgets.

When we know something is coming and we plan for it, it helps us plan even better for our future needs, for ministry opportunities that we may have. And that, that's true for you at a family level, it's true for us as a church. Consistent giving, consistent generosity is just really helpful. But, but secondarily, and maybe even more importantly than that, the habit of consistency keeps our hearts consistently from being attached to money. When we give on a consistent basis, we are every day doing something that keeps us from getting too attached to temporary temporal stuff.

As an act of discipleship, with my tithes and offerings, I give every other week sort of off my paycheck so that, that, that comes out of there automatically. At least once every two weeks, the Holy Spirit gets to remind me that God owns everything. Now, he reminds me of that a lot more. But at the very least, every two weeks, I get reminded, oh, yeah, God, you own everything. Now.

Paul says in First Corinthians 16:2, he says, Set aside a sum every week in keeping with your income. Every week, Paul says, do you have a habit of consistent generosity in your life? Whether it's daily, weekly, bi weekly, monthly, maybe seasonally, because there are seasons in our lives where more generosity is asked of us. Maybe it's just every seven years when you think of it, but at least every seven years. Put a note in your calendar saying, oh, I need to be consistent.

I don't know where you want to begin, but I would encourage you to start by being consistent. Start at once a month. If you're not doing anything, then move to twice a month. Then move to once a week, seven days a week, 24 hours every day. Be generous, because consistency or regular giving is a habit that will help you and help us as a church be good stewards of God's resources.

So be consistent, set a pattern, and stick with it. And then there's another habit, the habit of intentionality. Remember, in Second Corinthians 9, 7, Paul says, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give what you've decided in your heart to give. That implies some intentionality, not reluctantly. Don't begrudge it, but don't feel compelled by someone.

Don't let yourself be manipulated by someone. Why? Well, you don't

want to be stupid. Can I say that? I got in trouble for saying a word the last time in church.

I said, shut up. And Carly just really reprimanded me. I mean, I prayed about it. I had to pray a lot about that and repent. I've asked her forgiveness.

I asked your forgiveness. But there's things that we don't want to be foolish about, and we don't want to be foolish with generosity. It's too important to be foolish. So don't let yourself be manipulated by this. Why?

God loves a cheerful giver. God loves a cheerful steward. I am a sucker for a hard luck story. You come and tell me that the kids are not going to have Christmas, and by golly, we'll sell a car to make sure that your kids have Christmas. There is always room, and we need to make room in our lives for spontaneous generosity.

But I'm telling you, if we can be intentional about budgeting for the unexpected or the surprise opportunities that come our way, it prepares us mentally and emotionally beforehand so that we can be Generous and cheerful, cheerfully. Generous intentionality takes sort of the emotion out of the emotional pressure out of the equation. And as someone who can be very susceptible to emotional pressure, I give you permission to be intentional about what you decide to give. And when you get to the point where that's the cutoff, you unapologetically say, I have given all I can give. And then you pray about it.

And if God says you to give more, give more. But, but don't feel guilty about setting some boundaries on your generosity. Because we want to be intentional because God loves a cheerful giver. I don't know. Have you ever given emotionally and then regretted it?

Like, why did I do that? Anyone besides me? Yeah, yeah. God loves a cheerful steward. And ironically or biblically, one of the best ways to stay cheerful about your generosity is to decide long before the need arises what is necessary to set aside for those unexpected divine opportunities to give generously and cheerfully.

So that's the third habit, the last habit. Is this just the habit of confidence? I think that's where a lot of us struggle. But Paul says as he reminds them, he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply it for you. God is going to take care of you.

Paul promises this. Now, why does he do this? Why does he promise God's continued provision for generous people? Is it so that you can store it up in bigger and bigger barns? Now, remember a couple weeks ago, the bigger and bigger barns are where moths rust and thieves hang out.

That's not the. The purpose of God's continual blessing. Instead, God promises his provision to you so that you can pay it forward. You can generously provide for others. You can cheerfully provide for others.

And, and Paul says in 1st, 2nd Corinthians 9, 11, he says, you will be enriched in every way. In every way. Not just financially. In every way. So that you can be generous on every occasion that God calls you to be generous for and through us, your generosity will result thanksgiving to God.

Now, are people giving thanks to God because of your generosity? If you've never given consistently, start somewhere with an amount that verges on the uncomfortable. Because I believe it is true, you cannot outgive God. I have been doing this at. I'm going to be 59 years old this year on the 19th.

You might want to mark that in your calendars.

59 years old. And I remember as a young kid starting this process with my allowance, 10% give it to God. Now, I'm not a legalist about this at all, but I do think it's important that we be consistent and in some sense we stick with it, you know, and confident. Because there have been seasons where I have had very little to give. That 10% was minuscule.

And then there are seasons where that 10% is scarily large. You're like, what?

I just know that I have not been able to outgive God. I stand here today just provided for. And it's because I've trusted God with this stuff. So I'm going to encourage you guys, if you're just starting on this journey, make the same offering for six months straight. See what the Lord does.

See what the Lord does in your heart, in your finances. It's going to build confidence in your life. You're going to develop a habit of confidence. Now, Alan said this a couple weeks back and he and I are both very aware that everyone in this room is in a different place financially. Some of you are living pretty confidently in your economic reality, maybe too confidently depending on your wealth.

Others live not there. Some of you live with some financial fear. Some, Some of you live with financial anxiety. Some. Maybe you're embarrassed about your finances.

Maybe you don't really want to talk about your habits because they're not great. Some of you are not making ends meet. You are not living extravagantly by any means. Your heart's in the right place. You want to be generous, but actually you, you.

It's just. There's just not anything left. Once you take care of yourself, you. You may need the church to help you get on your feet. But others of us, we waste money like it's nobody's business, don't we?

Some of us are remembering stupid, stupid debt decisions we made and go, I wish I could have. I wish I could take that back. I wish I had never bought that again. I'm talking from a place where I've been. I've been in all that, in all that world where things were a little bit.

And then places where I had so much that it sort of scared me a little bit. So I come from a place of very personal pain when it comes to bad financial habits. But getting good, healthy habits in place does so much. It helps us face down the tendency to be. To be greedy or to grow complacent in where we are in our finances.

I know that for me, good habits can help alleviate a lot of stress. Like if I know what's going to happen, that takes one stress out of my life. If I can be consistent, that can take a stress out of my life, anxiety out of my life. Good habits can help you slowly unravel bad financial decisions, and good habits can help you move into a better financial place. We're in the process of putting together some financial ministries, related stuff for some advisors and looking at different plans and strategies.

Those are all really good and those are useful. And when we have those ready, we'll roll them out and encourage all of you to take part in that. But no matter where you are today, I'm telling you, if we can start with gratitude and just be so thankful for what God has done in our lives and if we can be consistent and just. Just develop a pattern, a regular pattern of giving, and then if we can be intentional. Let's.

Let's think through this. Let's not. Let's not just be driven by emotion. Let's. Let's be thoughtful about this.

And then in that time and in that process, I believe we get confident we can see God's hand working in our lives. God providing what we need, God showing up when he needs to show up, and God giving us an abundance when we know that we don't deserve it. But he's good and gracious to us all. This just reminds us that God is ultimately in charge of all of it. He owns it all.

As our value says here now, as we come to a time of communion, I tell you, there's nothing like remembering the generosity of God and giving us Jesus to stoke the fires of my own generosity. And again, this goes back to. This just goes back to the fact that he loves us so much. We are his children and he. He wants to.

He wants to bless us. He wants to take care of us, but he wants us to learn to trust him to do that. He doesn't want us to be living in fear and anxiety. You can. You can rest assured in the love of God.

Can I just say that again? We can rest assured in God's love for us. And since he owns it all, I owe it all to Him. The old hymn says his grace stands out when I think of the cross. This song we sing around here, I'm kind of surprised Shauna didn't sing it this morning since we talked about God's love for us.

But it goes like this. Oh, how he loves you and me. If you know it, sing it with me. Oh, how he loves you and me. He gave his life what more could he give?

Oh, how he loves you 0 how he loves me. Oh, how he loves you and me.

As the communion is past, we're just going to sing that again. Just our voices. I don't know key we normally sing that in, but that seemed like a decent key. And that's going to be our. That's going to be our communion prayer this morning.

This song. Father, bless this time. Oh, how he loves you and me.

Oh, how he loves you and me.

He gave his life what more could he give? 0 how he loves you 0 how he loves me. Oh, how he loves you and me.

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