

WORSHIP IN GENEROSITY

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, March 24, 2019

I would like to give someone here \$30,000 dollars! (Dear reader, I'll bet you're sorry you missed this sermon!)

However, it will come with this stipulation: you must spend it all, but you can only spend \$1 each day.

It probably doesn't seem like such a big deal anymore... only \$1 a day. (No one claimed my offer.)

Our time on earth is bounded by birth and death. If God gives you 80 years, that will be nearly 30,000 days. You cannot save any of them for later and you cannot spend any of them in advance. Just one day at a time.

This may not seem so significant, unless you realize that at the end of your life, God, who gave you those 30,000 days, will require an accounting from you for how you spent each one of them. How did you spend last Monday? How did you spend yesterday?

(Today, you're in church with God's people, worshipping the Lord, and that's a good start! But the day is not done yet.)

I am speaking to you about worship. In the last two sessions, we have learned that we may worship in FELLOWSHIP—fellowship with God and His people—demonstrated by an attitude of SURRENDER to God and acceptance of people, and a lifestyle of sacrificial and faithful SERVICE.

Today, I'd like to add that worship is also expressed in our THANKS, our TIME, our TALENTS, and our TREASURES. In other words, we may

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Hannah was unable to conceive children, but she pled with God in prayer for a son, that she might dedicate him to the Lord's service for all of his days. God heard, and a miracle ensued: Hannah became pregnant and bore a son, whom she named Samuel (which means "God heard"). When she had weaned the boy, she brought him to the Tabernacle at Shiloh to present him to Eli, the priest.

1 Samuel 1:26 "Sir, do you remember me?" Hannah asked. "I am the very woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord. 27 I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and He has granted my

request. ²⁸ *Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life.” And they worshiped the Lord there.*

Don't miss this! Their worship *began* with her gift! She gave her son to the Lord and they worshipped the Lord there.

Worship always begins with a gift. It may be the surrender of your will to God, or the surrender of your pride. True worship always includes a gift. Listen to Apostle Paul:

Romans 12:1 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.

True worship begins with a gift. And here's a gift we can all give:

Thanks

Most of us in this room share a profound sense of gratitude to God for all that He has done for us through Jesus Christ. But it wasn't always so for us. Expressing thanks has long been a challenge for humans!

Romans 1:20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

²¹ *Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like.*

In contrast to this ingratitude, King David of Israel (1,000 years before Jesus was born) made sure that the worship of the Hebrew people would be marked by thanksgiving, a feature that he often included in the psalms that he wrote and sang.

1 Chronicles 16:4 David appointed the following Levites to lead the people in worship before the Ark of the Lord—to invoke his blessings, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel.

David wrote (among many others):

1 Chronicles 16:34 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

150 years later, this expression of worship had largely fallen out of practice, but King Jehoshaphat, in response to a word of prophecy, found a place for it again, and what a powerful impact it made!

The combined armies of Ammon, Moab, and Seir had allied themselves against the people of Judah and threatened to ransack the city of Jerusalem. The residents were in a panic!

2 Chronicles 20:13 As all the men of Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones, wives, and children, ¹⁴ the Spirit of the Lord came upon one of the men standing there. His name was Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite who was a descendant of Asaph.

¹⁵ He said, "Listen, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Listen, King Jehoshaphat! This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid! Don't be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours, but God's. ¹⁶ Tomorrow, march out against them. You will find them coming up through the ascent of Ziz at the end of the valley that opens into the wilderness of Jeruel. ¹⁷ But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the Lord is with you!"

¹⁸ Then King Jehoshaphat bowed low with his face to the ground. And all the people of Judah and Jerusalem did the same, worshiping the Lord. ¹⁹ Then the Levites from the clans of Kohath and Korah stood to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud shout.

²⁰ Early the next morning the army of Judah went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. On the way Jehoshaphat stopped and said, "Listen to me, all you people of Judah and Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be able to stand firm. Believe in his prophets, and you will succeed."

²¹ After consulting the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang:

"Give thanks to the Lord; his faithful love endures forever!"

²² At the very moment they began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves. ²³ The armies of Moab and Ammon turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. After they had destroyed the army of Seir, they began attacking each other. ²⁴ So when the army of Judah arrived at the lookout point in the wilderness, all they saw were dead bodies lying on the ground as far as they could see. Not a single one of the enemy had escaped.

King Hezekiah, who came to the throne 300 years later, re-established the practice David had begun.

2 Chronicles 31:2 Hezekiah then organized the priests and Levites into divisions to offer the burnt offerings and peace offerings, and to worship and give thanks and praise to the Lord at the gates of the Temple.

Worship the Lord by generously giving Him your thanks.

Another gift we can all give to God in worship is our...

Time

Time is the great equalizer. Everyone gets exactly 24 hours, or 1,440 minutes, each day. No one gets more than you do.

How do you spend it? Someone said, "You can't kill time without injuring eternity." Lost time is a tragedy.

Of course, there are many ways we NEED to spend our time: we must rest, we must eat, we must mind our hygiene, we must exercise, just to keep ourselves going. But keep ourselves going for what? What do we do with the life God has given us?

Where does worship fit in? Out of 168 hours in your every week, how many does God get? Many of you give Him at least two hours every Sunday; some of you, less often. Two hours for God and 166 hours for what? How does a relationship thrive on such a meager diet? If this describes you, who are you depending on, practically speaking, for the vast majority of your week?

Here's an average daily occupation for folks like us:

- 8 hours to rest
- 1 hour for personal hygiene
- 3 hours to prep meals, eat, and clean up
- .5 hour for exercise
- 1 hour to commute
- 8 hours to work

That only leaves 2.5 hours each day. No wonder you feel like you never have enough time! Does God even get 15 minutes of that?

Instead of giving God the leftovers, when you're already tired, what about giving Him the firstfruits of your day? What about waking up 30 minutes earlier, and after showering and brushing your teeth and getting a cup of tea or coffee, you kneel down or sit and give God your undivided attention for 30 minutes—worshipping, reading the bible, and praying for family and friends? How do you think He might reward your faithful attention?

Isaiah 40:29 [God] gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

God has promised to renew your strength, if you will make time to wait on Him.

Psalm 62:1 I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from Him. ² He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken.

Psalm 62:5 Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him. ⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken.

Isaiah 30:18 For the Lord is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for His help.

Isaiah 64:4 For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like You, who works for those who wait for Him!

A God who works for those who wait for Him! Many times I've wondered why God didn't seem to be working for me, or answering my prayers. Then, I realized I hadn't been waiting for Him (I had been pushing ahead in my own strength, filling my time with busyness).

Worship the Lord by generously giving Him your time.

Another gift we can all give to God in worship is our...

Talents

Worshipping God with our talents begins by recognizing their Source!

Exodus 28:3 Instruct all the skilled craftsmen whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom. Have them make garments for Aaron that will distinguish him as a priest set apart for my service.

Whether you're thinking of natural talents or developed skills or supernatural gifts, their Source is God, our Maker, and Christ, our Savior.

If you really recognize that fact, you'll begin to see how to use your talents to honor the Lord.

Sure, you use many of them to earn a living, but don't use them JUST to earn your living. Turn some of your work into worship. Acknowledge God as you use your skills and talents. You can do this by giving Him thanks as you work. You can also do this by using those same God-given talents for the Lord's work, as well as your own.

Recognize that one purpose for your talents and skills is to build up the Church of the Living God!

1 Corinthians 12:4 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

⁷ A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

It's great that you can earn a living, but you can also make an investment for eternal rewards.

The church needs your talents and skills. Purpose to volunteer some of your time on a regular basis in the church and in the wider community. Pay forward what God has given you. Ask one of the pastors today how you could serve?

And if you're not sure what your talents actually are, we can even help you discover that!

Worship the Lord by generously lending Him your talents.

One more gift we can all give to God in worship is our...

Treasure

The world is so confused about the purpose of our treasure, our material wealth—where it comes from and how to spend it. Isaiah noticed that some people totally misused their wealth:

Isaiah 46:6 *Some people pour out their silver and gold and hire a craftsman to make a god from it. Then they bow down and worship it!*

Their wealth became the object of their worship. While we may not be melting it down and forming statues to pray to, many people worship their wealth in its various forms. They surrender themselves to it, they think about it constantly, they sacrifice themselves for it, they treasure it for themselves.

Jesus told a fascinating story about what He expects us to do with the material resources that have been given to us.

Luke 19:11 *The crowd was listening to everything Jesus said. ¹² He said, "A nobleman was called away to a distant empire to be crowned king and then return. ¹³ Before he left, he called together ten of his servants and divided among them ten pounds of silver, saying, 'Invest this for me while I am gone.' ¹⁴ But his people hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We do not want him to be our king.'*

¹⁵ "After he was crowned king, he returned and called in the servants to whom he had given the money. He wanted to find out what their profits were. ¹⁶ The first servant reported, 'Master, I invested your money and made ten times the original amount!'

¹⁷ " 'Well done!' the king exclaimed. 'You are a good servant. You have been faithful with the little I entrusted to you, so you will be governor of ten cities as your reward.'

¹⁸ "The next servant reported, 'Master, I invested your money and made five times the original amount.'

¹⁹ " 'Well done!' the king said. 'You will be governor over five cities.'

²⁰ *“But the third servant brought back only the original amount of money and said, ‘Master, I hid your money and kept it safe. ²¹ I was afraid because you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn’t yours and harvesting crops you didn’t plant.’*

²² *“ ‘You wicked servant!’ the king roared. ‘Your own words condemn you. If you knew that I’m a hard man who takes what isn’t mine and harvests crops I didn’t plant, ²³ why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’*

²⁴ *“Then, turning to the others standing nearby, the king ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’*

²⁵ *“ ‘But, master,’ they said, ‘he already has ten pounds!’*

²⁶ *“ ‘Yes,’ the king replied, ‘and to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.*

One thing this story reveals is that what we’ve been given is not really ours; it has only been lent to us (“Invest this for me.”). We are stewards of another person’s goods.

Another thing He revealed is that we must one day give an accounting for our management of His gifts—whether time or talents or treasure.

A third thing Jesus taught is that He will reward faithfulness, regardless of the amount of the profit. So it will not be based on how you compare to anyone else, but on how you trusted and obeyed.

Fourth, He showed us that fruitlessness—when we’ve been given so much privilege and opportunity—is simply selfishness, and earns a major loss.

What are you returning to the Lord of the good things He has entrusted you with?

Offerings and worship go hand-in-hand:

1 Chronicles 16:29 Give to the Lord the glory He deserves! Bring your offering and come into His presence. Worship the Lord in all His holy splendor. (Also Psalm 96:8-9)

Genesis 28:20 Jacob made this vow: ²¹ “The Lord will certainly be my God. ²² And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything He gives me.”

All that you have has been given by God. If you will honor Him with the first tenth (the tithe), He will let you use the remaining 90% as you see fit. Tithing is worship.

If this is not yet your habit, I urge you to make up your mind to honor God with the first tenth of your weekly or monthly increase. It may seem impossible from the outside looking in, but if you

trust God as you offer it in worship, you will find that “with God all things are possible.” He can stretch the 90% farther than you can stretch the 100%!

Listen to the wisdom of Moses:

Deuteronomy 12:8 “Your pattern of worship will change. Today all of you are doing as you please,⁹ because you have not yet arrived at the place of rest, the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession.¹⁰ But you will soon cross the Jordan River and live in the land the Lord your God is giving you. When He gives you rest from all your enemies and you’re living safely in the land,¹¹ you must bring everything I command you—your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, your sacred offerings, and your offerings to fulfill a vow—to the designated place of worship, the place the Lord your God chooses for His name to be honored.

Worship is not always what it appears to be. Our patterns of worship need to change. Pleasing yourself is not worship.

Through the prophet, Malachi, God asked:

Malachi 3:8 “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!

This is the only occasion in the entire Bible when God invites us to test Him. Only with the tithe. Give it a shot. See how big God is. See how He can take care of you!

Think you can’t afford it? I say, you can’t afford not to!

Generously honoring the Lord who saved you with your thanks, your time, your talents, your treasure—that’s real worship.

Our definition now reads:

We worship in FELLOWSHIP—fellowship with God and His people—demonstrated by an attitude of SURRENDER to God and acceptance of people, and a lifestyle of sacrificial and faithful SERVICE, expressed by generously GIVING Him our thanks, our time, our talents, and our treasure.