

✠ *In the name of Jesus* ✠

I have a price tag here that says: “Equal in value to the blood of Jesus.” That’s how much you are worth. Is that a lot or a little? It’s a lot! | But think about it a different way. Can you exchange the blood of Jesus for a car? Not even the cheapest one on the lot. So the world sees this price tag hanging on us and says, “You ain’t worth much.” | But now think about the price tag from God’s point of view. Can you exchange all the wealth in the world for one minute in heaven? Not even a second. So this world’s wealth isn’t good currency for the next life.

We live here for now, but when the time is right, we want to live with Jesus forever. For this reason it’s important to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. When his precious blood was shed on the cross, it paid the penalty for every sin. This makes Jesus’ blood worth more than all the wealth in the world. Sinners who trust that God is telling the truth when he says we’re forgiven through Jesus’ blood—these sinners get to spend the next life with the Lord instead of in the place of unending torment.

Hanging a price tag on us is appropriate. We really do belong to God. We were bought at a high price. We are valuable to him. But he didn’t buy us just to display us like a collectable. He wants us to live for him as if we are his servants—his slaves. Slaves of righteousness—that’s what we are. We serve God as thanks for giving us what Jesus deserved instead of giving us what we sinners deserve. We know these things well, right?

Part of what we do as servants of God is called ‘management’ or ‘stewardship.’ It’s only one part, but it’s an important part. ‘Stewardship’ is a neat word. It comes from two Greek words that mean ‘to manage a household.’ Let’s say you were wealthy enough that you needed someone else to manage your estate. Well, many of you don’t have to imagine too hard. If you have any money in a bank account or invested in mutual funds, the manager of that account is your steward. Today we pay stewards rather well. If you lived back in Bible times you might have bought a slave to manage your household, or you might have been a slave managing someone else’s property. Today we hear the word slave and we think, “How horrible” because slavery in the United States was among the cruelest forms of slavery in history. But in Bible times slaves could have a better life than free people. It was common for slaves to become the manager of part or even all of someone else’s household. Imagine the trust! Remember how Joseph was the steward of Potiphar’s house? The Bible says Potiphar trusted Joseph so much that he didn’t concern himself with anything except for the fact that he had a nice dinner waiting for him when he got home from work (see Gen 39:6). Joseph had complete control over Potiphar’s money and property. That’s what we are to God. We are Josephs to our Lord. What an exalted status: to be called a ‘steward of God’! We have complete control over God’s money and things—as much as he has permitted us to accumulate. He trusts us! As Americans we like to think we are

free and belong to no one. But in reality we all are servants of our boss, our teachers, our clients, our partners, our government. And spiritually speaking we believers are servants of God. What an exalted status: to be called a ‘steward of God’!

But it’s not easy to serve God well as his steward. [Set up a gentle “**tug of war**” across the center aisle with a thin string.] The sinful flesh and the world with the devil pull on one side of us, and the new self with the Scriptures and the Sacraments pull on the other side of us. But it’s not a game. When the Lord saved us, he wanted us to experience the joy of walking in his paths and counting his blessings. But the devil tugs at us by getting us to concentrate on the nice things of this life. For instance, if you don’t like us talking about giving offerings to the Lord, is that because your sinful flesh is feeling threatened about having less in its hot little hands? The flesh doesn’t like giving money away—unless it is allowed to feel proud about it. “Engrave a plaque so everyone knows that I gave this gift.” To win this tug of war, let’s go to the baptismal font for “a drowning.” When we confess our sins, it’s like drowning the sinful flesh all over again, like when we were baptized. “Lord, I hate living for my sinful flesh. And I have done quite a bit of that in my life. Thank you for forgiving me through Jesus. Help me live for you.”

**Perspective makes a difference!** Living this life is like passing through the ocean as a submarine. Since you’re underwater,

you can’t see where you’re going. But you do have a periscope. You can look out at the world around you. But who gets to look through your periscope: your sinful flesh or your new self? It makes a difference who looks.

Your sinful flesh thinks that life is all about you and ‘getting’ and ‘experiencing.’ So when it comes to giving an offering, the sinful flesh wants to see this as ‘giving to the church’ or, to make it less appealing, ‘giving to an institution.’ It wants us to think about ‘giving’ the same way we think about ‘making a purchase.’ It asks: “Is this a good deal, or is my offering worth more than what I get from the church? What do I really get out of church anyway? I’ve got so many other bills. Giving to church is just another bill to pay. Besides, there’s an economic downturn. My income has been cut back. So I’m cutting back on all my spending. And ‘offering’ is just another word for spending.” When my sinful flesh looks through the periscope, it sees the world only in terms of itself.

But let the new self look through the periscope, and a whole other perspective comes into view. The new self likes to look at the cross. “Yep, Jesus died for me there and cleaned me up. My God looks at that same cross and loves me for Jesus’ sake.” Then the new self likes to look into the empty tomb. “Nope, Jesus isn’t there anymore. He’s alive. There’s my proof that I’m forgiven.” Then the new self looks around at our acquaintances and relatives, even our enemies, and sees people for

whom Jesus died. “I want them to hear about Jesus too.” And when the new self looks through the periscope at the church, it says, “Ah, there’s the place where I gather with other sinners to hear from God’s Word how forgiven we are in Jesus. I can hardly believe God lets me help him get the message out. He doesn’t need me, but he lets me participate in the work of sharing the gospel.”

God could have chosen to distribute all his gifts directly. So it’s not like we have to help God or else his work won’t get done. But he knows how enjoyable it is to bring people to faith in Jesus and give them peace and hope. **GOD THINKS GIVING IS NEAT.** So he gives us the privilege of being his earthly agents (Luke 12:42). Sooner or later God’s good stewards notice is that he is always the first one to act—he gave us life, and then eternal life, and then promised enough ‘food’ to sustain both kinds of life. To repeat: God is the first one to act because **GOD THINKS GIVING IS NEAT.**

At its heart, stewardship is believing that we are so trusted by God as his redeemed servants that he will daily place into our hands countless blessings. He intends these blessings not just for our good, but so that we can benefit others. In this way we become God’s representatives in an awesome chain reaction of gracious giving! God hopes we recognize that stewardship is not so much about **something we do** as it is about **who we are**: his redeemed children. We are God’s trusted servants whom he has graciously called into his service. His goal is NOT

getting us to **conform** to certain outward regulations: “Just give this much and I’ll be satisfied.” Rather God’s goal is to **transform** our hearts through his grace from our sinful flesh’s attitude of ‘living for me’ to our new self’s attitude of ‘living for *“him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood”*’ (Revelation 1:5). When this happens we believers also think **GIVING IS NEAT**, and we gladly adjust our way of living so we can give like God gives. God gives to us regularly, frequently, generously, cheerfully, and without worrying that he’ll run out. Because **GOD THINKS GIVING IS NEAT**, God’s people also give regularly, frequently, generously, cheerfully, and without worrying that we’ll run out.

**Giving from our abundance.** Did you notice these 20 items here? Let’s say these 20 items represent all that God entrusts to us as his stewards. It all belongs to God. We’re his servants, and that’s a good thing. If we were slaves of humans, we would have to give everything over to the master and keep none of this for ourselves. But look how much God lets us keep. If I give away 5% to help the poor and to help spread the gospel [Move one item to the side.], look how much God lets me keep. If I give away 10%, look how much God lets me keep. If I give away 15%, look how much God lets me keep. We give our offerings from a position of abundance.

**Willingness** is such an important characteristic of good stewardship. Offerings which are acceptable to God come from a willing heart. Time and

ability are also acceptable to God as offerings. When people bring generous offerings of time or money, there is more than enough to get the work done. These three truths are brought out nicely in **Exodus 35:4-10,20-22,25-35; 36:3-7**. This was the time when the Israelites were building their church, the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting.

Moses said to the whole Israelite community, “This is what the LORD has commanded: <sup>5</sup>From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. *Everyone who is willing* is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze; <sup>6</sup>blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; <sup>7</sup>ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; <sup>8</sup>olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; <sup>9</sup>and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and the breastpiece [of the high priest]. <sup>10</sup>All who are skilled among you are to *come and make* everything the LORD has commanded... <sup>20</sup>Then... <sup>21</sup>*everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him* came and brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. <sup>22</sup>*All who were willing, men and women alike*, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments... <sup>25</sup>*Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun*—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. <sup>26</sup>And *all the women who were willing and had the skill* spun the goat hair. <sup>27</sup>The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and the breastpiece. <sup>28</sup>They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant

incense. <sup>29</sup>All the Israelite men and women *who were willing* brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do. <sup>30</sup>Then Moses said..., “See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel..., <sup>31</sup>and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts— <sup>32</sup>to make *artistic designs* for work in gold, silver and bronze, <sup>33</sup>to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in *all kinds of artistic craftsmanship*. <sup>35</sup>...with skill to do all kinds of work as *craftsmen, designers, embroiderers* in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers... <sup>3</sup>*The people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning*. <sup>4</sup>So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work <sup>5</sup>and said to Moses, “*The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done.*” <sup>6</sup>*Then Moses gave an order...: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.*

See? Our perspective on giving is even more important than the actual giving. **GOD THINKS GIVING IS NEAT.** May God help us look at ‘giving offerings’ from his perspective. We glorify him when we think like he thinks. And God causes us joy as we give like he gives.