



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMON

## “The Power of Positive Giving”

**Scripture Lessons:** *Deuteronomy 15:7-10; 2 Corinthians 9: 6-7*  
*This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling Jr.*  
*on October 22, 2023, at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church*  
*in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### **Deuteronomy 15: 7-10**

<sup>7</sup> “If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. <sup>8</sup> You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. <sup>9</sup> Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor<sup>[a]</sup> might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. <sup>10</sup> Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

### **2 Corinthians 9: 6-7**

<sup>6</sup> The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

### **The Power of Positive Giving**

According to Johns Hopkins expert Lisa Yanek and her colleagues, people with a family history of heart disease [but] who also had a positive outlook, were less likely to have a future cardiovascular event than those who had a negative outlook.

Their assertion was/is that positive people are 13 percent less likely to have coronary issues than their negative counterparts over a period of 5-25 years.

Another study, one from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, found that “women who were optimistic had a significantly reduced risk of dying from several major causes of death ... when compared to women who were less optimistic.” And that was over a period of eight years.

An interesting study out of the University of Kansas went so far as to say that the simple act of smiling

— even fake smiling — reduces one's heart rate and blood pressure during stressful situations.

One of the pioneers of linking serious thought with positive emotion was the late Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who back in 1952 wrote a best-selling book entitled, "The Power of Positive Thinking."

Now, while there are obvious limits to the role that positivity can play in our lives, and it certainly doesn't mean that every little thing is alright. Things are not alright: Israel for example. There really is something to be said for conditioning one's mind toward successful living, and in this morning's New Testament Lesson, we learn that positivity is actually one of the keys to successful giving.

The Apostle Paul put it like this: "God loves a cheerful giver." ... And while that doesn't mean that God despises a reluctant giver, it does mean that God especially loves that giver who does so with a glad and generous heart ... and not under compulsion.

On the day the church began their capital campaign for a new roof, the pastor -- knowing that times were tight for many people in the small rural congregation where he served -- made it a point to say from the pulpit that while monetary donations were needed and appreciated, people could also give in other ways.

After the service was over, a man approached the pastor on the portico and said, "I'd like to contribute financially, but times are little tight right now ... What else can I do?"

"Well, that's easy," said the pastor. "I know you like to go fishing on the weekends and you never miss a home football game ... maybe you could go to half of the home games or maybe you could skip fishing a couple weekends a month and come down to the church and work on the roof."

The man looked at his pastor somewhat dismayed, and after thinking deeply for a few moments, he looked at his pastor with reluctant resolve, begrudgingly pulled out his checkbook, and said, "I think I'll just go ahead and pay for the roof." (PAUSE)

We've all probably been there at one time or another -- holding back or giving as a matter of obligation rather than a matter of the heart.

Perhaps you have wondered why the Bible seems so preoccupied with our giving being just that, a matter of the heart? Well, the answer is quite simple ...

You see, God knows that when we recognize the one from whom our blessings flow, and when we return to God a portion of those blessings -- happily and cheerfully -- we are well on our way to being preoccupied with God.

That's what stewardship is all about ... we've have heard that word "stewardship" more than a few times over the last several weeks. The word itself is a combination of two words really, one having to do with "house" and the other having to do with proper "distribution" – a kind of sharing ... dividing something up, if you will.

And so, when those two words are put together, we have a single word, which, at a very basic level, means the right administration of one's household.

In other words, stewardship is about managing well and wisely the distribution of resources, resources which, at the end of the day, belong not to us, but to God.

And about this, the Psalmist could not be more clear: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it ..." (cf. Psalm 24:1).

Lord knows, we have every good reason to respond to God with glad and generous hearts, because all that we have and all that we are ... is a gift from God, and it belongs to God ... and, what's more, we belong to God!

We have been bought with a price -- a love that lived and died and rose again for us -- and how we respond to God's grace / what we do with our life and the substance of our life – it really matters to God; indeed, it brings God glory ... I dare say, it makes God's heart smile!

To be sure, we should give cheerfully all the time and not just during stewardship season. The Apostle Paul likens our giving to a seed that is sown ... and we are called to sow it generously — and not just our tithes – but our lives!

Listen to what Paul says: "The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

I can't help but wonder... what if that paradigm ... giving of ourselves bountifully rather than sparingly – what if that were to become the presiding paradigm – the main mindset - for us and for the world? (PAUSE)

We all know the paradigms that are employed these days. Socialism verses democracy. The oppressor verses the oppressed! Malevolent mankind verses pristine mother nature. They always seem to be about someone or something over and against someone or something else. I mean, imagine if our mindset had nothing at all to do with one's ideological or social identity, but had everything to do with a heart inclined toward abundance rather than scarcity. A life lived bountifully rather than sparingly.

Imagine though, if the presiding paradigm were no longer some variation of "us verses them?"

I get it, that may be too much to ask the world, but is not too much to ask of Christ's Church ... to be positive and upbuilding and joyful in ways we interact with God and neighbor.

And It begs the question: what if we were more bountiful? ... If we didn't hold back a lick? What if the whole of our lives -- our thoughts and words and deeds -- what if they just bubbled over with a cheerful response to God's goodness and grace?

Something James' said in last week's sermon stayed with me -- a lot of things about his sermon stayed with me ... but especially the part about "doom-scrolling" or "doom-surfing" ... I hadn't heard that term before -- but it speaks to the act of spending our time looking at the worst of the world around us, and filling our minds with things that bring us down.

Tell me, what difference would it make, if we were more bountiful with good thoughts ... if we opened the floodgates to the positive -- to intentionally fill our minds with those things that are enriching and upbuilding? (PAUSE)

And what if we spoke like that? What if such basic and positive affirmations were more bountiful in the way we talked to each other?

I doubt that many of us ever truly grasp how it is that something we say can literally transform someone else's life ... for better or for worse.

Ah, if we truly knew the impact of our words, and how they could positively impact someone's life ... would we dare refrain from speaking them? Would we dare use our words sparingly?

In Proverbs 25 we are told that "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." And when I read those words, it sure seems to me like King Solomon is telling us that our words / our words are like food for the soul. (Pause)

Goodness knows our deeds can also bear witness to the manifold grace of God! In our Old Testament lesson this morning we are told to give liberally and ungrudgingly -- and when Moses goes on to implore us to not be "hard-hearted" or "tight-fisted," he is clearly talking about our physical posture / our tangible and hands-on response to those in need.

And Paul also had such charitable and financial responsibilities squarely in mind when he wrote our New Testament lesson.

But, here again, sowing bountifully is not just about responding with our tithes and offerings -- it is about responding with the whole of our being ... and doing so with a cheerful spirit and in such a way

that we contribute bountifully to God's harvest ... and by no means sparingly.

When it is all said and done, the more we learn about sowing bountifully, the more we do so with a happy heart / the more we give of ourselves and of our substance as the Lord has prospered us -- the more we do those things -- the more dependent and thankful and trusting we will be upon God.

By God's grace, may we never simply talk about stewardship -- but may we demonstrate stewardship / may it be, for us, a way of life / a life that never ceases to positively celebrate the one from whom our blessings flow ... the one to whom our gifts are given.

Ours is a life that is to be loving and intentional and financial and compassionate and exciting and thankful ... because, when we think like that, and talk like that, and act like that ... we -- glorify -- God! ... And there is nothing more important we can do than that!

++++++

Let us pray ... Gracious and Loving God, your Word tells us that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, but rather in the abundance that is you!

For all the ways in which you have so richly blessed our community, our church, our lives ... we give you thanks and praise, and we celebrate that you are not yet done!

Give us in this season and every season not only a clear vision, but also abundant provision.

We pray for courage in our dreaming, wisdom in our planning, and hope amidst the unknown. Help us to live into your truth / into our calling.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen