

What On Earth Am I Here For?

You are Given Riches to Reflect Generosity

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." ~ Winston Churchill

On a commuter flight from Portland, Maine, to Boston, back in 1987 the pilot heard an unusual noise from the rear of the plane. Henry Dempsey turned the controls over to his co-pilot, and he went back to check it out. As he reached the tail section, the plane hit an air pocket, and Dempsey was tossed up against the rear door. The original noise was caused from the rear door being improperly latched prior to take off. Now the force of his weight caused the rear door to open and immediately Dempsey was sucked out of the plane. The co-pilot saw the light that indicated that there was an open door, and he radioed the nearest airport requesting permission for an emergency landing. He reported that the pilot had fallen out of the plane, and he wanted a helicopter to search that vicinity. But after the plane landed, the ground crew found Dempsey holding onto the outdoor ladder of the aircraft. Somehow as he was sucked out he caught a hold of the ladder with his hand. And he held onto it for 10 minutes while the plane descended from 4,000 feet at a speed of 200 miles per hour. And the toughest thing was he somehow kept his head from hitting the runway, which was only 12 inches away when they touched down. And according to the news report, it took airport personnel several minutes to pry his fingers off of the ladder.

All of us love the things of this world, and we hold onto those things. It's not uncommon for people like you and me to have our fists closed just about as tightly as that pilot did on that ladder. We say, "What's mine is mine, and I'll keep it." We are good at spending and saving, but not very good at sharing what we've been given. Our sin has so twisted our thinking and our hearts, we've become people who will settle for the love of money and things, instead of the love of God.

Now let me ask you: Is God's fist closed tightly? Or is God open-handed and generous to you? How do you view God? As someone who "takes" from you your time, and money, and fun, and freedom? Or do you see God as a "giver" – as someone who gives you way more than you deserve or could repay? As someone who makes you feel alive, and breathes energy into you ... and hope and joy?

A lot of people see God as a close-fisted hoarder. They see Him like the worst of the image we have of used car salesmen – like He's just trying to manipulate and pressure us out of *OUR* money or our time. And, to be honest, there are a lot of preachers who give used car salesmen a GOOD name! There are preachers who manipulate and pressure people to give money or do this or that, and it ends up being for the preacher's personal gain. Those preachers give God a bad name. Their actions reflect poorly on God's graciousness.

As a pastor, have the responsibility to challenge you. I am bound to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. And if we don't talk about stewardship issues, if we don't do that, do you know what happens? We keep our church congregation from being able to enjoy all the benefits God has in store for you.

We too often (AND SINFULLY) interpret giving to God as coercion. We don't give in love, or joyfully, or to bless others. Jesus offers forgiveness for this sin too.

Jesus didn't hold on to what was rightfully His. He gave it all up. He gave Himself up, in love, for you! The Bible says about Jesus: ***"Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich."*** Jesus went from riches to rags, so we could go from rags to riches. We have "every spiritual blessing."

Friends, God is an open-handed, generous Giver! And those who give to God, do it (1) as a response to God's giving, (2) as a reminder that God has promised to ALWAYS be a "giver" in their lives in the days and years ahead; and (3) when we give, we show that we are like Him. God is a generous giver, and He wants us to be like His character – to be generous givers too!

It's All About Grace. We've seen over these past few weeks that worshipping God and growing closer to Him in His Word are in response to God's grace in our lives. Giving is no different. We give because God is a Giver. We give out of hearts that overflow with gratitude for God's great love. If we've experienced even a TASTE of God's love, forgiveness, and strength, we won't grumble about giving because we know His generosity. We'll be thrilled to give back to God who keeps giving so much to each one of us.

God owes us nothing, but He gives us everything. In the Bible, God guided Paul to say, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for Your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9 We have nothing to use as bargaining chips with God. We can't show Him how good we are, because He knows far better than we do, that we aren't perfect, we haven't lived perfect lives, we've sinned, and way deep down in our hearts we don't love other people and love God the way we ought to. Usually the only person we love is ourselves.

That's why we need God. Before God we are like Untouchables with leprosy in India – nothing to offer, no hope at all, just poor and needy. But Jesus stepped out of all the riches of heaven, to give it all up to help you. He became poor – that is, was born and lived like a regular guy on this earth – except He lived perfect, without wrongs or sin. Then He gave up everything He had, when He gave up His life on the cross to pay the price you owed and the penalty you deserved for all your wrongs. It's all paid for completely!!

The result is that "you through His poverty" – because of all Jesus has done for you – "become rich" -- that is, your record of a life of wrongs and sins and selfishness – it's all forgiven. Because of Jesus' forgiveness, your sins can't keep you out of God's good graces or out of heaven. And right now, you've got God on your side, everything to hope for, and you can live life the way it is meant to be lived!

You and I are stinkin' rich! And we did nothing to earn it.

God owns it all and gives it to you to manage. What's one of the first words kids learn to say? After "mommy" or "daddy," children learn to say "mine!" We don't have to teach them to say that!

We love to possess things. And the more we possess, the more we can play the one-up game with our friends. We can't be happy until we have a bigger house, a nicer newer car, a faster boat, and more expensive clothes than the next person.

We like to own things. And we like to work a little harder from time-to-time, so we can earn a little more money, and use it to splurge on something special. We like the freedom of spending money however we want. And we do that, because we believe the money and stuff is all ours, to do with it whatever we want.

God says this: "... Every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are Mine. If I were hungry I would

not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.” Psalm 50: 9-12 The concept that everything in the universe was created by God and is owned by Him, shatters the idea that anything at all is *ours*, and we can do whatever we like with it. Those things you treasure, aren’t yours at all. Your house, your car, your wallet, the clothes in your closet, the cars in your driveway, your money in the bank – it’s all God’s. Even your time, and intelligence, your artistic ability, your personality – everything about you that enables you to earn money – all of those are gifts from God too.

Everything you have is just loaned to you for a while. It’s like the funeral of a rich person. Someone wanted to know much money was in the will. So he asked, “how much did she leave?” And the answer was – “all of it!” Everyone of us will leave all of it. We can’t take it with us, because it never was ours. We just get to manage it. And one day we will have to give an account what we did with it.

See, that means, every time you look at your house you can say, “God gave that to me to use. That’s a sign that He loves me.” You can look at your car, and your clothes, and your furniture, and your 253 inch plasma screen TV with dolby surround-sound – and you can say, “God gave that to me to use. That’s a sign of His love for me.” It doesn’t matter if you’ve got a lot or a little – it’s all from God and it’s all signs of His love for you.

When you understand that God owns it all, it helps you open your hand and let HIM say how you use everything He’s let you manage. You can say, “Here, Lord, all this is yours. What do you want me to do with it?”

God gives you the privilege of partnering with Him to bring His hope to this world. When Paul was writing some books of the Bible, there was a famine going on around Jerusalem. So, some believers in other parts of the world sent money to help those without food. They were so eager to do this that they pleaded with Paul to let them join in. Paul describes this time when he wrote: “For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” 2 Corinthians 8: 3-4

You are only going to be on this earth for a few short years. Do you want your life to count for something after you’re gone? You’ve got a choice to make: either you can live for self-centered purposes which won’t help *ANYBODY* in the long-run, or you can use what you have to partner with God in His purposes. Friends, Jesus is the hope of this world. And He invites you to partner with Him, to bring His hope to the world. That’s a PRIVILEGE! That’s a JOY to do something that really COUNTS!

God promises to keep on giving! When you were a little child, did you lie awake at night worrying where your next meal tomorrow was going to come from? Children don’t. They know that their mom or dad provided that day, so kids trust that they’ll provide the next day too.

Now that we’re older, some of us have trouble believing that God will provide tomorrow, and next year. But that’s His promise. God wants us to use money to trust that He is God over all! And that He can take care of you. We like to keep money to ourselves and rely on what we have saved for our future. But every time you give to God, you are trusting in His promise to keep on giving. You are trusting Him to provide for you. And that TRUST is what God really wants. God wants your heart, not your money.

If God wanted your money, He would be more interested in wealthy people than in poorer people. But that’s not the case! Wealthy or poor, He wants us to give (1) Not counting on what we have ourselves, and (2) not worrying about what we don’t have. He wants us to give TRUSTING God in His love to provide for us. God doesn’t need your money. But He does want your heart. And when you give, you are trusting Him to keep on giving and providing for you.

God wants you to experience joy! This may sound crazy, but giving can actually make you joyful. Usually we only think of GETTING as making us have joy, and giving as making us sad. Paul said in the Bible: “God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you” 2 Corinthians 9: 7-8 God wants you to experience all His goodness and grace. He wants you to have joy.

Have you ever notice that generous people are joyful people? Stingy people are self-absorbed, angry, and resentful people. Which kind of person do you want to be? God wants you to have joy. That’s a gift of His grace. Remember: it’s all about God’s Grace!

So if we are to give in response to God’s grace, then we need to ask, **How Should We Give?**

1. **Give generously.** The Bible says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” 2 Corinthians 9:6
2. **Give cheerfully.** God reminds us: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7 Maybe you’ve heard the saying “Give ‘til it hurts.” Don’t give ‘til it hurts. Give ‘til it feels good! God wants us to give “cheerfully” -- to laugh out loud because we’re so thrilled to partner with Him.
3. **Give expectantly.** Jesus said: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.” Luke 6:38 You can be sure to expect God to bless the people you give TO, and He will bless you as you give. That doesn’t mean you give TO GET more money from God. The blessing God gives you may not be material.

How MUCH Should We Give?

I learned to give by growing up watching my parents. My dad is very generous. He taught me from early on to tithe – to give 10%. If I got a dollar allowance, a dime went to God.

A tithe was what people long ago were COMMANDED to give to God. Paul says in the Bible that now that Jesus has come, we don’t give out of obligation, but we give freely out of extreme gratitude for all God’s done. The idea, is that people who know Jesus, have reason to give more than a tithe.

Start where you are. You may look at your finances and think, “Man, I’m in debt up to my eyeballs! I want to give, but I sure can’t give 10% right now.” If that’s you, then the most important thing is that you reflect on God’s love and grace to you. As you want to express your thanks and gratitude to God out of your heart, you’ll find ways to do that.

One way, is to work to get out of debt, so you CAN give more to God and to be a partner with Him. Paul said in the Bible: “If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.” 2 Corinthians 8: 12

No matter what your finances look like, give some now, as much as you can, and as you get your life in order, raise the level of your giving.

Focus on how much you’ve received from God. Don’t focus on what you don’t have. Don’t say, “I don’t have a big new boat like my neighbor.” If you compare yourself with others, you’ll always be disappointed. Focus on all that God HAS given you. And remember, if you live in the United States, you are already richer than 80% of the people in the world!

Ask God for wisdom and direction. Ask God to lead you in every part of your money management.

Watch what you buy. To get out of debt, you'll have to make some hard choices to change your lifestyle and buying habits. But when you do, you'll feel so much better because you can have the joy of being generous.

Learn to manage your wealth. John Wesley once said: *"Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can."* That's good advice for us too.

Make a written commitment. Writing down your personal faith-promise of how you plan to give HELPS YOU! It takes the guess work each week out of figuring out how much to give, and you won't have to wrestle with greed 52 times a year. Look at your finances, pray about it, make a commitment, write it down, and follow through.

And, **Give something special from time to time.** I know people who give regularly, and then from time to time, they give a special gift. They give from a bonus they got, they finance a special project, they give to the needy. That giving really brings a smile to their face.

In the 1960's the Kingston Trio sang song about a thirsty man who stumbled upon a deserted farm in the middle of desert. If he didn't have water soon he'd die. Next to the shack stood a rusty old pump with a leather bag tied to the handle. A weathered note told of a water jug buried nearby to prime the pump and provide water. The temptation was strong. Would a thirsty man pour his only water down a dark hole hoping to receive more in return? Or would he drink the water, struggle on, and leave nothing for anyone who might come after him?

This here pump works just dandy as of June, '32. I cut me a new leather washer that oughta last another five year or so. But that leather washer will plumb dry out and needs priming. 'Neath the white rock I hid a filled bottle of water and corked it tite. It enuf to prime the pump but not iffen ya drink some furst. Pour bout a quarter of the bottle and let her soak a bit. Then pour you the rest steady and slow and pump like crazy and you'll sure enuf git water. The well has never run dry. Have faith. When you git watered up, fill the bottle and cork it again. Bury it where you found it for the next feller.

Signed: Desert Pete

P.S. Don't go drinken the water furst. Prime the pump liken I said and you'll git all you can carry.

We don't give in order to get more. But faith in God's promises will require you to do some sacrificial acts that seem stupid, illogical & foolish!

Giving is AUTHENTIC faith because it's more than just talking the talk – it's walking the walk! It's having a firm conviction that God is a GIVER, and then ACTING on that conviction. Giving is all about grace, and trusting God's grace so deeply that you step out and make your life match your convictions. That's authentic faith.