

October 29, 2006

Good Morning

I am so glad that you are here today—especially if you are visiting this church, perhaps for the first time. Today we launch a spiritual journey at FPCM, “Imagine the Possibilities,” our capital and stewardship campaign. During stewardship campaigns in the past, I have almost felt sorry for a brand new visitor who happens to show up when we’re talking about giving money to the church.

But I don’t feel that way today. In fact, I think today is a perfect Sunday for visitors to see what FPCM is about, because this campaign is different from anything I’ve ever been a part of. It is truly a spiritual journey exploring our relationship with God and “imagining the possibilities” of what God can do and be for each of us and for this church. If traveling on this journey inspires us to more generously support the work of the church, so be it and praise God!

This is what I hope my sermons and the Scriptures we will be reading in worship over the next four weeks will help us do. And yet we must also use this opportunity to become educated or reminded about what the Bible says regarding money. Listen to how Randy Alcorn, a noted author on Christian stewardship, sums this up:

Throughout the entire Bible there are roughly 2,350 verses concerning money. This is roughly twice as many as faith and prayer combined. Fifteen percent of everything Jesus said related to money and possessions. He spoke about money and possessions more than heaven and hell combined. The only subject Jesus spoke of more often is the Kingdom of God. Why? Because the Scriptures make clear there is a fundamental connection between a person's spiritual life and his attitudes and actions concerning money and possessions. Often we divorce the two—Christ sees them as essentially related to one another.

Therefore in this space beginning next week I will be sharing with you some of the facts of Scripture for you to prayerfully consider on your own. For now, welcome to worship—I look forward to imagining the possibilities with you.

In Christ,
Mary Kay

November 5, 2006

Good Morning

Welcome to worship as we continue “Imagine the Possibilities,” our spiritual journey together and campaign for stewardship and capital needs. As I said last week, I hope that we can go on this journey not from a place of guilt or obligation, but from one of hope and peace, listening and paying attention to God’s guidance and trusting in the outcome.

Therefore you won't be hearing sermons designed to manipulate you into giving out of a sense of guilt.

It is important for us to know what the Bible says about money. As I noted in this space last week, there are roughly 2,350 verses concerning money in the Bible—roughly twice as many as faith and prayer combined. So beginning now I want to offer several important lessons for you to prayerfully consider on your own. First, tithing—what is a tithe? The following discussion comes from the ministry “Generous Giving:”

The word “tithe” comes from an Old English root meaning “one tenth.” The tithe was an offering of the first and best of one's income to the Lord as an expression of thanks and dedication. In the Old Testament agricultural economy, tithes were paid not in cash but in crops or livestock. There was also provision for freewill offerings above and beyond the tithe, but the tithe was primary standard of Old Testament giving:

“And of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you.”—Genesis 28:22

“Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field.”—Deuteronomy 14:22

In the New Testament, however, the tithe is never commanded and rarely even mentioned. Instead, John the Baptist raises the standard of giving to 50 percent (Luke 3:11), and Jesus exhorts us to give 100 percent (Luke 21:1-4). So the scarce mention of the tithe in the New Testament is evidence not that God expects less of us today but that far more is possible. The tithe is still a helpful divine guideline insofar as it reminds us to give our firstfruits (i.e., the first and best of our income) to the Lord, who owns all our money anyway. But by New Testament standards, the tithe is only the beginning. Because the fulfillment of all God's promises has come in Jesus, far more is possible. Does the tithe apply to us today? Yes, as the starting point of more generous Christian giving.

Thank you for being here today!

In Christ,
Mary Kay

November 12, 2006

Good Morning

Welcome to worship as we continue “Imagine the Possibilities,” our spiritual journey together and campaign for stewardship and capital needs. If you have been here the past two Sundays, you will know that in this space I am offering several important Biblical lessons about money for you to prayerfully consider on your own. Today and this week, please reflect on Mark 12:41-44:

[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

This Scripture is often cited as a reproach to the wealthy for not giving sacrificially. Indeed, this is an important stewardship lesson in that in order for our offering to God to be truly meaningful and pleasing, it must cost us something. We should feel that we are giving up something important or pleasurable to us in order to give back to God.

These words of Jesus also show us how critical it is for ALL of us to give sacrificially, regardless of external circumstances. It would have been easy for the poor widow to think, “Look at all the money being given by the rich people—the church doesn’t need my penny.” And from a practical standpoint, that would be correct.

Stewardship, however, is not about being practical. It is about honoring God with our resources—period. A very pertinent example for us at FPCM concerns the chance—still a distant and uncertain one—of selling our parking lot. Some have expressed the thought that if this sale were to happen, it would then be unnecessary to support our capital campaign. This thought may be “practical,” but it certainly is not Scriptural.

Or suppose someone surprised us with a \$10 million dollar gift—would that mean that the rest of us are excused from giving to the church? Not if we want to be true stewards and truly surrender our hearts to God, seeking His way and asking what He wants us to do.

Thank you for being here!

In Christ,
Mary Kay