

**Cultivating Faithful Generosity**  
**God Cares for Us and Meets Our Needs**  
**Matthew 6:19-34**  
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For the next three weeks, we're going to explore the topic of stewardship. I'm convinced this topic is important for us several reasons. First, Jesus spoke about money and possessions more than any other topic. Secondly, our culture's perspective on wealth is completely at odds with the Bible's teaching. Finally, our perspective on money and possessions is central to who we are and how we live, so it's important that our hearts are aligned with God's heart on this issue.

For those reasons, I'm committed to preaching regularly on stewardship—even though it's not typically a favorite topic for people. I'm confident that when some of you heard we were doing a three-week series on stewardship, you weren't too excited. Earlier this year when I mentioned in a staff meeting that I try to preach on stewardship every two to three years because it's such an important topic, Cody Sherry, who has been our high school youth pastor for six years now said, "You haven't preached on stewardship since I've been on staff here." That was a surprise to me, so when I realized I hadn't preached on stewardship for at least six years, I knew I needed to preach this series.

So, why aren't people usually excited to hear sermons on giving and why are pastors reticent to preach on the subject? I suspect that since generosity lies at the crux of who we are and how we live, what we do with our money is a sensitive subject, but there's also the reality that pastors and churches often haven't handled stewardship well. We've used guilt motivation in preaching, our communication seems self-serving, and pastors and churches haven't always been good stewards of what people give—at times mismanaging the resources people in churches have given.

As I've prepared for this series, I've grown more and more convinced that when people in a local church like McBIC give generously, it's a win/win/win—a win for the local church, a win for God's kingdom, and a win for them in growing as disciples of Jesus. God's desire is for us to experience his abundant life, and part of thriving is being a faithful and generous giver.

There are so many ways to approach the topic of stewardship, and it hasn't been easy for me to sift through them all to determine what my focus will be over the course of the next three weeks. I want to give special thanks to our Treasurer Derek Mauldin and to Shawn Greenland for their ideas and input in this process. Both guys do an excellent job overseeing McBIC's finances, and they're committed as board members in our church and in their professional lives to helping followers of Jesus grow as stewards of all God entrusts to us.

Each sermon in this series is going to have four facets:

- I'll provide some context for us by highlighting a cultural giving trend
- I'll teach from a Biblical passage that addresses the topic of generosity
- I'll share some testimonies from people in our church
- I'll provide a snapshot from our local church that connects giving with mission

I've chosen the title "Cultivating Faithful Generosity" because I'm convinced good stewardship requires intentionality. As your pastor, I'm committed to nurturing a culture where generosity is normative and where we encourage, challenge, and equip each other to be good stewards. The graphic for our series captures the idea that cultivating generosity includes teaching and modeling what faithful stewardship looks like for younger generations.

The cultural reality I want to highlight today is probably not a surprise to many of us. In many ways, generous giving among Christians has fallen out of practice. My sense growing up in church in the '70s and '80s was that tithing—giving 10% of your earnings to the church—was standard practice for many churchgoers. That may or may not have been true then, but we know today that the average churchgoer gives less than 2% of their income to charitable causes. Not only are most Christians not giving 10% of their income to the church, on average they're giving only 2% of their income to charitable causes, including their local church.

Before I go on, I want to say that I see tithing—giving 10% of our income to the church—not as a hard and fast rule or legalistic requirement but as an Old Testament principle that I and many other followers of Jesus use as a starting point for what generosity in our local church looks like. Tithing, like keeping the Sabbath, was a law God gave his people in the Old Testament to guide them toward incorporating important principles into the fabric of their lives. I don't

know many Christians today who strictly follow the Sabbath, but the principle of Sabbath is one God established to teach his people the importance of rest and relying on his provision rather than their own striving, and that's a critical understanding for followers of Jesus today. Similarly, the tithe was established to reinforce for God's people that everything they "owned" belonged to Him, and as they faithfully gave a portion of their money and possessions back to Him, He would care for them and meet their needs. Tithing isn't the stringent requirement for us that it was for God's people in the Old Testament, but the practice of generous stewardship is as vital for us today as it was then.

I've titled today's sermon "God Cares for Us and Meets Our Needs." That's a basic statement, kind of like "Jesus loves me," but it lies at the heart of God's call for his people to be generous stewards of all He has blessed us with. The words for that title come from Matthew 6:19–34, a portion of Scripture that's included in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I'll begin by reading verses 19–24.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." – Matthew 6:19-24

Jesus begins by reminding us how temporary our earthly treasures are, and then He emphasizes a sobering truth: "Where our treasure is, our heart is." That is a powerful insight. What you and I treasure, what we value, what we spend our time thinking and worrying about is where our heart is.

Jesus continues in verse 22 with these words:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

The metaphor Jesus uses here of the eye being the lamp of the body and that connecting to our treasure isn't one that's familiar to us, but Jesus is highlighting the central role possessions and wealth play in our lives. If we have a healthy perspective on wealth, it will be evident in how we live our lives and how others see us. Conversely, if our perspective on our material possessions is unhealthy, it will have a noticeably negative effect on us. In verse 24 Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

This ties back to Jesus' point about our heart being where our treasure is. I probably don't have to tell you that money and possessions can become our master. Trying to earn money, obsessing over saving it, trying to make more of it, and worrying about not having enough can become all-consuming. Jesus tells us we can only have one master: God or money. We can't serve them both.

Jesus' preliminary words in verses 19–24 of Matthew chapter 6 lead into the main text I want us to focus on: verses 25–34. The heading in my Bible over this section is "Do Not Worry." I encourage you to follow along and listen closely, because these words are so apropos for the time we live in.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for

tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. – Matthew 6:25-34

Those words are straightforward and clear. Jesus tells us not to worry about money and possessions, because God loves us, cares for us and will meet our needs. This section closes with a promise that if we seek after God, He'll see that our material needs are met, and then Jesus says again, "Don't worry. Tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble on its own."

Throughout our series, I'll be sharing anonymous testimonies people from McBIC shared with me regarding what God has taught them as they made choices to be generous in giving to their local church. Before I share these, I want to acknowledge that there's a lot of bad teaching out there about giving to God and the church. Many people take God's promise to meet our needs when we commit our treasure to Him as an investment strategy. "Give a percentage of your income to God, and He will multiply it many times over." Unfortunately, too often those faith gifts end up padding an individual's pocket or being used in unscrupulous ways by a ministry organization. God does promise that as we're faithful in giving to Him and in stewarding well what He has blessed us with that He will care for us and meet our needs, but his heart isn't that we give to Him so we get an even greater return. His heart is that as we choose to be generous and trust Him, He will faithfully meet our needs and grow in maturity in Him. I've asked Pastor Susan to read these two testimonies for us.

For many years, I didn't give a penny to the local church I was attending. I found myself under a mountain of student loan and credit card debt. There was nothing to give. It was at that moment when I was convicted by some fellow believers to start giving sacrificially. I began giving 3% of my income not because the church needed it but as an act of trust that God would provide for me. It was hard! Each week was an act of worship and of surrender.

And then God showed up. A few months later, the young adult group I was part of offered Financial Peace University. I began to take ownership of my money and began

the very long process of getting out of debt. After a few years, I eventually got to 10% of my income, a sign of my faith that yes, I do trust God.

I had a hope, an expectation even, that God would show up through checks in the mail. It didn't happen quite like that. God used generous people to invite me to sporting events, something I greatly loved but cut back on. God provided opportunities for additional income through babysitting. When I relocated to a new area, God provided me two places to live at a free or reduced rent. He entered in through the generosity of others! And through those experiences, my trust in God's goodness and faithfulness grew.

This journey had nothing to do with money. It had everything to do with my relationship with God and of experiencing His character. I experienced over and over again His love and care towards me His child. He is a good, good Father!

During our young adult years, we attended church pretty regularly and were active in some ministries. We always donated but did so irregularly. We did not tithe but gave what we felt was reasonable while raising a family. We were about a year from our first son going to college and three years from our second going as well. We had made a commitment to pay for our sons' education so they would not be saddled with loans to repay. So, we knew we had eight years of significantly larger expenses facing us. We made decent salaries with our jobs but nothing out of the ordinary.

One Sunday, the sermon was about tithing. We had heard hundreds of sermons on this topic throughout our lives, but unbeknownst to us, God put this particular message on both of our hearts. We were both quiet on the ride home, and when we finally talked about it, we realized that we were getting a clear message: "trust me with your finances."

So, at probably the most difficult time for us to take on added expense, we began to tithe from that moment forward and trusted that things would work out. About six months after that, I was offered a job from another company that would increase my salary by 40%. I liked my job but couldn't pass that up. When I handed in my resignation,

my boss went to HR, and they matched the salary offer so I could stay. About a year after that, my company went through a merger and my job was critical, and my salary increased another 50%! In about 18 months, my salary had more than doubled.

At that point, it would have been easy to start tithing, but God chose to challenge us with this at a very vulnerable time instead. We are so thankful that we accepted the challenge! We had no idea what was in our future, but we trusted in Him to take care of us. This obviously ended up being a huge turning point in our faith.

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I love that both of those stories emphasized God's provision and how God used the arena of stewardship to help them grow as his disciples.

I want to conclude the sermon today by connecting our faithful giving as a church family to McBIC's view of itself as a "community center" for our local community. When my predecessor, Ken Hepner, came to McBIC in 1985, our church met in its original building about a quarter of a mile from here at the corner of High and Marble Streets in Mechanicsburg. A vision Ken voiced frequently was that the Mechanicsburg Brethren in Christ Church would become a community church. Seven years after Ken arrived at McBIC, we moved to this current location, and over the past 30 years, we've grown to become a community center. I can't give a complete list, but here are some of the groups we host in our facility:

- Two preschool classes meet each school day through the Kindergarten Counts program
- Local soccer teams practice in our facility and on our grounds for nine months of the year
- Operation Wildcat hosts its semi-annual spring and fall yard sales in our worship center
- Local businesses use our facility to host team meetings
- Mechanicsburg Community Church—a church we planted—has their offices at McBIC, and a Hispanic church and a Nepali church meet in our building every Sunday
- Multiple sports teams from Mechanicsburg High School have hosted end-of-season banquets in our worship center

- We frequently host funeral services for churches that don't have large enough facilities to host their own
- Various ministry groups host fundraisers and/or meetings in our facility

Outside of the preschool group that pays us for using our facility, these groups use our facility and grounds free of charge. We communicate that the facility is available for their usage free of charge as long as they handle set up, tear down, and clean-up, but some groups do give us an honorarium. I love that several thousand people (a rough estimate) from our community have the chance to use our facility and grounds each year. Recently our staff has been impressed of the need to begin praying that the people who use our facility and grounds throughout the week would be drawn to Jesus through experiencing his love as they interact with us and are blessed by using our facilities.

The ministries that happen inside this building on Sunday mornings and throughout the week to children, teens and adults are important, but our facility truly is a community center for people living around us. Your faithful financial giving as well as your generous spirit in not limiting this building's usage to our church family allows our church building to be a center for our community's usage and ultimately an opportunity for them to experience Jesus' heart of love for them.

I'll conclude our time this morning by reading some words written by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 9. These words apply to each of us in regard to our personal faith journeys, and they apply to our church family and the impact God has through us in our local community.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. – 2 Corinthians 9:6-8