

*“Living to Get, Living to Give, Giving to Live”*

*Pastor Randy Orndorff*

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Key Text: Zechariah 8:1-13

Lynn Nelson’s Testimony

## **I. Introduction: Some Friendly Reminders**

Over the last 2 weeks we have been focusing on Stewardship with our theme being “Living to Get, Living to Give, or Giving to Live”. Our scriptures have challenged us to consider how we choose to live our lives. Today you have received not one, but two pitchers. The basic stewardship question in life is “Am I Living to Get or Living to Give?” Can anyone answer that question in a simple fashion? Am I living to Get? Yes or No? Am I living to Give? Yes or No. It does not seem to be all that complicated. It’s like when John the Baptist says of Jesus, “Jesus must increase, I must decrease.” That suggests life is not all about me, my wants, my needs.

We’ve considered that with the measure we use in living and giving it is going to be measured back to us from God.

## **II. Tithing—Test Me in This!**

This is the one thing God tells us all to test Him in. In Malachi 3:10 we are told to “bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour so much blessing that there will not be enough room for it.”

What measuring cup are you going to choose to use to give and live your life?

Over and over in the Old Testament you read about the people when they were getting it right and living right with God gave their first fruits, their very best. Their grain, their livestock. It was not from the bottom of the jar, it was from the top.

Proverbs 3:9-10, “Honor the Lord with your wealth, from the first fruits of your crops; then your barns will be overflowing...”

## **III. Some Old Testament History**

In Ezra, which is a tie-in with our scripture today, the Israelites who had been taken captive into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar were finally allowed by King Cyrus to return to Jerusalem. For the same reasons Zechariah describes the people had been scattered because they failed to trust God. They were living to get. Their focus was on their own wellbeing. They sinned against God.

Here’s how it went:

The word of God came to Zechariah, “This is what the Lord Almighty says, ‘Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another, Do not oppress the widow and the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other’.”

Folks, this sounds a lot like Jesus and Paul. Rightly so, because this is the message of Almighty God. And why do we not assume the best about each other instead of the worst?

Then God says:

“But they refused to pay attention: they stubbornly turned their backs and stopped up their ears.

#### **IV. What God Will Do—What We Are Likely to Do**

Now let's pause there. God is more than willing to meet all our needs according to His riches in glory. And yet when we refuse to pay attention, when we turn our backs on God, then God will give us ears, but we will not hear: eyes, but not see. Isaiah says the same thing in chapter 6:9-10. "Go and tell this people. Be ever hearing, but not understanding; be ever seeing, but not perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused, make their ears dull, and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Question: Are you living to get or living to give? Paul says Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

It's pretty clear God wants God's people to hear, to see, to understand. It's clear we are prone to wander from the God we love.

I have made an interesting discovery. I forget. Oh, not too bad with names. But I forget. Not too often where I put my keys, wallet, phone, or planner. Sometimes where I laid my reading or sunglasses. But, I forget. The biggest discovery is I forget God's word, God's promises. The results of living for myself, versus others. Being in Disciple this fall has made God's Word fresh for me again and in some indirect way, I hope fresh for you.

I forgot how easy it was for God's people in the Old Testament to forget even after all God did for them. It happened to Moses, to the Judges, to Saul, David, and Solomon. God wanted to be their king! They wanted to be like all the other nations around them.

God wanted them to be a set apart, distinct people. They wanted to mingle, intermarry with other faiths, bring in idols and they neglected their relationship with God. Every king in both the North and South Kingdoms did evil in the eyes of the Lord, except two. The United Kingdom of Israel ended up divided. They became inward focused, did not keep God's laws and commands. They neglected the poor, the widow, the orphans. They lied, cheated, looked to soothsayers, committed adultery figuratively as a nation, literally in their holy places of worship.

#### **V. We Forget**

They forget. I forget. We forget.

So, Zechariah continues, "They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or the words that the Lord Almighty sent by His spirit through earlier prophets. So, God was very angry. Verse 13 says, "When I called they did not listen, so when they called, I would not listen. So, I scattered them where they strangers." (V 14)

This is what happened when the people God brought up out of captivity in Egypt to the promised land forgot. So here I am today reminding myself and reminding you as God's people at CUMC not to forget but to remember. To remember the goodness of God. To remember God's many blessings. To remember how God has watched over you and never left or forsaken you, though maybe people have.

To remember God's faithfulness and mercy are new every morning. To remember God's provision over the past year and God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Today is Gratitude Sunday. Next Sunday is Christ the King. God still wants to be sitting on the throne of our hearts. God does not want us to be like the culture around us.

#### **VI. Remember Church**

On this gratitude Sunday, we are called to remember all of God's blessings. This week we celebrate Thanksgiving. I encourage you, before you eat where ever you are, take time with family and friends to just go around and thank God for something God has done in your life this past year. For each other, for food, for friends, for healing, or a new lease on life. Even in the midst of struggles, pains, heart aches find a reason, make a choice to thank God and rejoice.

That will be harder for some than others. The sting of death arrived on our family's doorstep again this week as Roy lost his battle with Leukemia. And yet, standing in that ICU with all his and my cousin's family, praying reading scripture holding hands, and crying, and remembering Roy's faith and positive outlook it drew us together, and we chose to celebrate Roy's life and move forward in a positive way, and can be thankful in the midst of the storm.

## **VII. Our God is a Jealous God!**

Here's the good news and it is really good news. In spite of our forgetting, our sinning, our living to get versus living to give, even though God gets angry, God does not forget or abandon God's people.

The people discover God is not relegated to a building. The building does not house God, God dwells where God's people are and where they are gathered.

If God's people confess their sin, repent and turn back to God, how quick is God to reopen our eyes, our ears, our hearts? Right now!

Zechariah says, "God is jealous for us?" God loves us and wants us to do well. God wants God's people to thrive, to care for each other, think the best about each other, help each other out.

Today as the exiled Israelites did, will we return to God with all our hearts? Will we choose to step up a cup and trust God? Will we, in the days and year ahead "Remember the goodness and graciousness of God"?

I love Zechariah's words and promises if we choose to live to give.

"Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets..., the city filled with boys and girls playing there." (V 5) "Will it be marvelous to them? Will it be marvelous to me?", asks God.

"Yes, I will save my people and be faithful to them. I will save you and you will be a blessing." (V 13) "Now, do not be afraid, let your hands be strong!" (V 14) God is asking God's people here and in many other churches today to now be strong, stand up, make a commitment, to remember and give with joy and gratitude.

## **VIII. Why We Give**

Don't give to give to a budget, don't give in order to get. Give out of gratitude, give to live, give to be a blessing as God has blessed you. That's how God's church on earth is going to make a difference in the world today. And God will hear, God will heal, God will restore, God will do great and mighty things we have not yet seen. And others will come to know God and God's saving grace as you have.

Verse 12 says, "The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce crops and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people." Do we trust in and believe in God and God's Word? How has God blessed you and how can God use you and me to bless others?

## **IX. A Commitment Followed Through**

There is a true story Pastor Art Fellows shared with me about a church expansion and a church member who wanted to donate a couple tractors to help raise money. The church also housed Vision Way, a Christian School. The farmer wanted to help both.

The plan was to donate a Farmall “M” and John Deere “GP”—old antique tractors to be auctioned off to offset the cost of the new building for the church and school. The donation was from a member who does not like the limelight. He is very humble. But it is an exciting and challenging time in the church, so he wanted to help.

From pictures, it was estimated that the Farmall to be valued at \$2,500 and the John Deere GP at \$3,000.

The tractors arrived at Aumann Auction and upon inspection an Aumann employee, looking over the tractors discovered something amazing. It was the very first GP tractor built. The employee looked it up three different ways. It was the first one.

They went to speak with the owner about it and told him the news and asked him, “Do you still want to sell it?” How would you respond.

The owner’s response?

“Yes, I gave it to the Lord and I hope it is a blessing.”

A guy named Jeremy, who attends the Taylorville Christian Church and worked for Aumann says, “We were really surprised; we were grateful; we thought how nice two old tractors; now we were just shocked.”

Folks, no one knows the value of a tractor, the value is what a collector will pay.

## **X. More Than One Can Imagine**

On October 27, 2018, the tractor brought \$78,000. Here’s the thing. Even though the owner found out about the value of the tractor, he committed it all to the church. That is amazing and uplifting. Was that guy living to get, living to give, or maybe he went a step further? Giving to live.

In a moment we, like the farmer, have a choice to make and a commitment to make to God and ourselves.

What will my giving look like in 2019? How will I use my time and my talents? You have your cards so you can fill out your name, contact info and how much you feel led to give, remembering with the measure you choose it will be measured back to you, that it is more blessed to give, than receive, and God wants you and I to be a blessing to others. Your time and talent card is just as important. Fill that out indicating ways you wish to serve God and God’s people in the coming year and then bring both forward as we sing our closing song and place them in this measuring bowl.

Church, may our hands and our hearts and our minds be strong to carry on the work of God in this church and in God’s church in our day. And watch God work and see the joy it will bring God and bring God’s people.

## **XI. Closing Prayer**

Let us Pray:

Oh God, on this Gratitude Sunday and into this Thanksgiving week we pause to remember all the ways in which You have cared for us, provided for us, and blessed us. Help us remember, God, that your desire is that we first give ourselves to You and then to others. If we do that the church will have all the money we’ll ever need to carry forward the work of ministry to disciple our children, youth, and adults and to engage in all sorts of mission to spread the glory of Your Great Name. Lord, fill our hearts with hope, courage, and a spirit

of generosity. We commit ourselves, our finances, our time, our talents, our passions all to You God. Help us all give so we can truly lives.

In Jesus' Name,

,

Amen.