

Investing for Eternity – Part 2
Giving Yourself First to God
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
January 11, 2026

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Purpose: The most important gift we can give to God is the gift of ourselves. When we do that, we acknowledge that everything we have belongs to God in the first place. Our response is to willingly give of our substance. We acknowledge our personal accountability to God and release it back to God – after all, it is His in the first place. We make giving a part of our regular gift back to God and in return, receive His guarantee of a promised supply.



Two crows were in a field when they noticed a figure that looked like a man in the distance.

"See that over there? What is that?" asks the first crow.



The second crow takes a long look and then says, "That's a scarecrow. Looks authentic, doesn't it?"

"How can you tell it's a scarecrow and not a person?" replies the first crow.

"Look at its hands," says the second crow. "It's not holding a cellphone."¹



Last week I began the first sermon in a series of sermons based upon Investing for Eternity: Biblical Principles of Stewardship. I mentioned that this series title is not unique to me. David Jeremiah preached a series by the same title several years ago.

Last week we explored two Old Testament passages of scripture that instituted the principle of giving our first fruits unto the Lord (Deuteronomy 26) and a widow that was willing to give her last morsel of bread to the prophet Elijah as a symbol of her trust in God (1 Kings 17). Today I want to continue in this series on stewardship by focusing on the number one priority when it comes to giving to God: that is, **we should give our lives to God first without any reservations.**

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the principle of selfless giving. The example he set before the church at Corinth was the churches in

Macedonia. This area is located in the northern part of modern-day Greece. The members of the churches in Macedonia were not simply giving a little bit of money off the top; they gave sacrificially of what they had as a demonstration of their total commitment to God.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 says this:

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; that in a great trial of affliction (keep in mind: they were a persecuted church) the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.



*For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we should receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they **first gave themselves to the Lord**, and **then to us** by the will of God.*

That last phrase magnified the priority of their sacrifice – “*they gave themselves **first to the Lord**, and **then to us** by the will of God.*”

The three churches Paul is referring to can be found in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 and also in Acts chapter 16 and 17. They are the church at **Philippi**, the church at **Thessalonica**, and the church of **Berea**. As you examine their examples of faithfulness as a church, we see they abounded to every good work.



In 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 we see how they abundantly gave even in the midst of poverty and affliction. They were poor and didn’t have much to give, but they gave anyway. I am sure they may have thought to themselves, if I give this, will I have enough to make it through a tough time? Will I have enough to pay my bills later? Will I have enough for my children? Will I have enough for my business? They simply gave – because the work of the Lord came first in their lives!

The amazing thing mentioned in verse five is that **they gave of themselves**. I have found that most people will give anything – except



themselves. Every day we use our money in exchange for giving ourselves to a project. We pay someone to cut our grass, clean our clothes, change the oil in the car, wash the car – why do we do this? It is because we don't want to give ourselves to those projects or responsibilities. We send missions money so we don't have to go. We send offerings to organizations because we do not want to volunteer our time. We will give so we do not have to give ourselves to the project or need.

Before we can truly worship God and give as we should – we should acknowledge that we should give ourselves wholly to the Lord. If we don't do that first, then everything else in our life will be out of balance because we have made something or someone more important than God. Where we spend our money is an indicator of what is most important in our life. If we put God first in every area of our life, then we can become a good steward of the material possessions we have. If we don't give ourselves first to the Lord, how can we ever be a faithful supporter of the ministry of the church?



Keep in mind, I am not just talking about your financial support of this church – I am talking about making God a priority in your life. Giving God **your time** – in study of the Bible and attendance at church. Giving God **your talents** – willing to participate in leading and actually doing the programs our church needs to do. Giving God **your treasures** – not only to accomplish the mission in this church, but to accomplish the mission of God in this community. If you are not giving your time, talents or treasures to the Lord's work it is because you have not given yourself to the Lord first.

I think today can be the right day for you to decide that you will put the Lord first in your life.

I cannot decide for you.

Your friends cannot decide for you.

Your spouse cannot decide for you.

YOU must decide to put the Lord first in your life.



David Jeremiah said this about giving ourselves to God. "If God owns me – If I have given myself to Him by way of dedication – then whatever I have and whatever resources are available to me all belong to God." If God owns me then I will make all my time, my talents, and my treasures – all I have available for Him to use. ***If God owns me.***

If God doesn't own me then

I will hoard my time for my pleasures,

I will withhold my talents because they should be for my edification,

I will withhold my treasures because I am number one, not God.

Could it be we do not trust God with all of these things because we do not fully trust the Lord with ALL the things in our life?

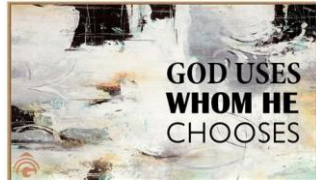


Once the Macedonians reached the place of total surrender, THEN they were able to give as God led them. Giving became the easy part.

Romans 12:1 reminds us to "*present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*" You see, God is more interested in YOU, than He

is in your gift. God is concerned about how we respond to Him and surrender our lives to Him.

If the truth be said, God doesn't need your money. God can accomplish His will for this church and community without your gifts. If you don't step up when God calls you, he will call another one to take your place. If this church doesn't step up when God calls, then God will find another church to accomplish His will. But God has called us to be co-laborers in His Kingdom work. Isn't that amazing? We are invited to be a part of God's plan and work!



Our giving reflects how we are obedient to what God taught in His Holy Word. If we love God, we will be obedient to what He has taught in His Word. Jesus even said it, "*If you love me, you will keep His commandments.*"

A lot of Christians live their lives in such a way that it appears God is present in most areas of their life. They may teach Sunday school, attend Bible study, come every Sunday, but there is a part of them they have kept back from God. That place kept back from God will always be a distraction and they will walk through life and never experience total victory.

Just like the Macedonians, we must come to the place where we say, "*I Surrender All.*" That hymn that we sang earlier by the same name was written by Judson



W. Van DeVenter. He said the song was written "in memory of the time when, after a long struggle, I had surrendered and dedicated my life to active Christian service."

Most people go through a period of self-reflection and inward struggle as they come to the place of total surrender to God. Maybe there is someone here that has never totally surrendered their life over to God. Maybe you have never personally trusted Christ as your Savior and humbled yourself before God and acknowledged your sin and asked Jesus Christ to give you freedom and forgiveness. Before any kind of stewardship can be genuine and lasting, you need to give yourself first to God.



If you are a Christian and you are holding back a part of yourself, then you will never totally have the Joy of the Lord until you give yourself first.

This is also true for churches. Many times, we think of the church as our own property and we do not want to make any changes to anything. Because the church has many different members, it often takes time to discern the will of God for the congregation and then be willing to surrender the church's future to the Lord's will. Are we willing to surrender the property and finances for God's will to be done here in this community or will we simply cling to it out of tradition or selfish ownership?

I am not making a proposal as to what we should do. But I do know we need to surrender our lives (personally) and our church (corporately) for the Kingdom of God for the Lord to use as He wishes.

We Need to Realize that Everything Belongs to God in the First Place

As the Macedonians gave of themselves to the Lord, they were able to give liberally to the work and ministry of God. Verse 4 says they *“implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift.”* They pushed the gifts upon Paul for the work of ministry.



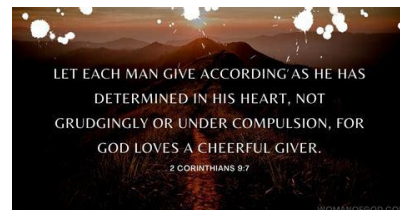
Ezekiel 18:4 says, *“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine.”* God owns everything, including us. When we acknowledge God’s ownership of our lives, then it sets us free to be who God wants us to be. Romans 14:8 say, *“Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”*

1 Corinthians 6:16-19 says, *“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

The New Testament teaches that we belong to God. Therefore, everything we have is the Lord’s. For some that is a lot, for others it is not so much. But whatever we have, it belongs to God.

We Respond to God by Willingly Giving of Our Substance

2 Corinthians 9:7 says, *“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”* If you give yourself to God, you will never



have a problem with your attitude about giving your resources to God. You can give with joy knowing you are involved and a part of God’s ministry. If you are holding out on God, then you will always struggle with this area.

We Recognize Our Own Personal Accountability to Him



We may be tempted to push the responsibility for funding ministries off on the church, but in fact the responsibility actually lies with you and me. We are individually accountable for our giving. When we give ourselves to God first, then we as a people can work together to accomplish a common goal. 1 Corinthians 16:2 says we are to lay aside our gifts weekly. That is why our offering envelope boxes have 52 envelopes for us to give each and every week. One day each of us will give an account to God for how we have supported the work of the Lord.

Over the years, I have had many conversations with Tom Chaney on Monday mornings when he would stop by early while the Tellers were counting the Sunday morning offering. He told me, almost every week, there was a pastor early on in his life that impressed upon him to give every week to the church. Faithfully Tom would come and bring his weekly offering. He loved the Lord with all his heart and he loved to support the work of the church regularly, consistently, and joyfully. I think of Tom often and deeply miss seeing him.



If we have **given ourselves first unto the Lord** – and make all we have His to use as He directs us – then we will not have fear in this area. Can you honestly stand before God and say, “God, I have done as you have led me in the area of stewardship and made all I have available to you. Every gift you have put in my hands, I have funneled that tithe into the work of ministry to proclaim your name among our community and around the world.”



Some people have a great fear of facing the Lord for their failure in this area of stewardship. Some feel very guilty about the way in which they feel like a failure in giving.

Maybe that is why so many are uneasy about the topic of stewardship. They haven't totally given themselves to the Lord and ***“They are walking a guilty distance from the Lord.”*** (quote by Charlotte Aycock member of Fremont Missionary Baptist Church) They know they are wrong in this one area and they still don't trust God.

Years ago, I was visiting a person in the nursing home. This person told me that the reason they could not support the church like they once did was because they didn't know how long they would be in a nursing home so they kept it all to pay for their nursing home care. I had not even mentioned the topic of giving or supporting the church. It was something she felt she needed to share with me.

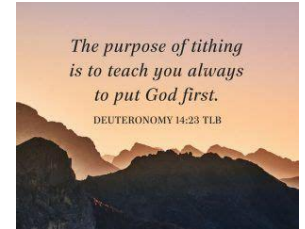


When that person died, she still had a lot left over. Did she leave any of it for the work of the church that they claimed to love? No. Did she leave any of it to causes that would

help people know about the love of Christ? No. She kept back from God in their life and in their death, and left it to another that will keep it away from the work and ministry of the church. She simply did not trust God to provide for her.

We Release Back to God That Which We Know is His Anyway

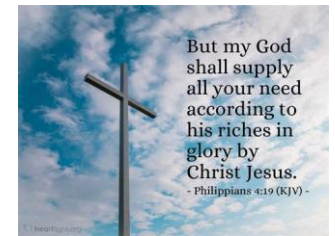
When we get it settled clearly in our hearts that all we have belongs to God – including ourselves – we will not be saying to God, “Lord, I'll give You some of my money.” Instead, we need to be saying, “How much of Your money should I keep for myself? How much should I return for Kingdom work so that You can do what needs to be done here on this earth?”



We Receive His Guaranteed Promise of Supply

We read in Philippians chapter 4 that the people there sent Paul money to provide for the necessities of life.

They knew there was a need and they freely sent him support. He didn't go about seeking a gift from them, but they freely gave. His response to them was one of my favorite verses in the Bible. ***“And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*** (4:19)



If you have put Jesus Christ first in your life and tithe into the work of God, He has promised to provide all your needs. God is saying He will take care of you. He has promised to be our supply when all other sources seem dried up.

Does that mean we will have everything we will want? No. Some of the things we want we really do not need. Does it mean that I will have the largest house, the largest bank account, the largest number of acres of land, the most thriving business? No. But He will supply our needs.

If we refuse to put God first, then we are saying to God, “I don’t believe You. I don’t trust You. I don’t believe You will do what You said.” That person in the nursing home that refused to tithe was only concerned about themselves. If I ever reach that place in my life, I want to be tithing right up to the very end.



The matter of stewardship and tithing is not a financial decision. It is a question of whether we are truly committed to God and trusting Him to be our supply. It is easy to say yes with our lips, but when times get tough, that is when the real test of our faith comes.

Let us today put Christ in first place in our lives and live it out the remainder of our days with Christ at the helm!

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹Mikey’s Funnies, A Crow Funny, Dec. 4, 2025