

1 Thess 1:1-4
Work of Faith, Labor of Love, and Steadfastness of Hope

Today we welcomed some new members. You heard them take the same vows that every member of every PCA church takes.

Membership is a two-way street and there are privileges and responsibilities. If we're honest we know that we all fail when it comes to fulfilling the privileges and the responsibilities. That doesn't mean that we give up and stop trying. No, we press on in repentant faith.

Today is a good day to give a REMINDER to all members of the important role we play in the overall health and ministry of the church. Even if you think you don't have much to contribute, you ARE a Steward of the Time, Talent, and Treasure that God has given you, and you have value to the overall ministry. You don't have to be an up-front person to make a significant contribution to the work and worship of the local church.

The grace of the gospel tends to give rise to the question, "What do you do, now that you don't have to do anything?"

We get a glimpse at the answer to that question in 1 Thess 1. Paul had instructed them in the good news of a Savior who had come – he lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died – he rose again, and He is coming again. That future hope fueled this small, persecuted church into action. They became examples of faith, love and hope – those who were awaiting Rescue had become rescuers of others.

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

Today I want to apply the work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope to two specific areas: Service and Giving.

This morning, we saw the projected funding for our 2024 Ministry Plan with its challenges and opportunities. Just prior to the sermon we had the offering and dismissal of children for ministry to them.

I mention those two areas – Funding and Children's ministries because when it comes to Member Vows to support the work and worship of the church those are two very clear practical ways that all MEMBERS can be involved.

In ANY church, financial participation is also crucial. That should come from members, and it CAN come from others who are served by the ministry. In both areas, participation by MEMBERS is important because of the Vows to support the work and worship of the church to the best of your ability.

How to SERVE:

1. Remember that God owns our time. We are stewards of the time He gives us.
. That needs to seep in so that our service is not just show but is really substance.

We wake up believing that we are the lawful possessor of 24 hours- Lewis – Screwtape.
My dear Wormwood,

Men are not angered by mere misfortune but by misfortune conceived as injury...

Interruptions anger him because he regards his time as his own and with interruptions, he feels that it is being stolen and he is being injured.

You must therefore zealously guard in his mind the curious assumption 'My time is my own'. Let him have the feeling that he starts each day as the lawful possessor of twenty-four hours.

JOSH MCDOWELL – “I don’t mind if you call me a servant as long as you don’t treat me like one.”
i.e. we want to be known as humble people, but we don’t actually want to be humble. JEUS WAS A HUMBLE SERVANT who humbled Himself in obedience to the point of death on the cross.

How TO SERVE:

Remember that God owns our time. We are stewards.

Begin with the pinky – If a person in a coma moves a little finger; it is a big deal. If you are protective of your time, don’t start with moving to India to work with street kids.

START SOMEWHERE. Don’t over spiritualize and seek God to the point of paralysis – do something, even if it may not be the best fit. Use Trial and error.

Ex: NEED FOR Children’s ministry – Sunday Morning and Wednesday nights!!

THE GOOD NEWS – typically the need is for helpers, NOT THE MAIN TEACHER.

Begin with each other in the body of Christ. – Needs and Requests emails ;CHILDREN NEED SERVING – they will neutralize any sense of “I’ll serve on my terms in a way that I’ll get visible credit”. It’s not glamorous but you will serve “the least of these”.

***We’d hate to come to the place where we have to say, “There is no Children’s church or nursery this week or no Wed Night WINK this week.”

If you don’t serve, then you’re expecting someone else to bear the load that we’re ALL called to carry.
We can serve because Jesus served us and lives in us.

**Imagine a community of people where the operative question is...,
“What can I do to help?”**

And where the mindset is

“ASK NOT WHAT YOUR CHURCH CAN DO FOR YOU, BUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR CHURCH”

Now, we’ll go back to the Stewardship of our ‘Treasure’ which reflects where our hearts are.

Do you ever get uncomfortable when people start talking to you about money?

Most people get uncomfortable when preachers start talking about money.

That must have made Jesus quite unpopular because he actually talked about it more than your average preacher.

So, if the topic makes you uncomfortable, then be encouraged. It’s only me talking; if Jesus were up here, he’d probably make you feel more uncomfortable.

As we consider how to ENGAGE through GIVING we must note that God is not silent on the topic. Here are some key verses for this morning:

Luke 12:15 Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

Luke 12:34 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

2 Cor 9:6-8 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace

abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

Non-believer or visitor..."I knew he'd talk about money"- I haven't been to church in a while and this is what I get. BUMMER

In reality, we don't talk much about money here at HPC; we certainly don't address it as much as Jesus did.

The issue isn't giving per se; it is GRACE and Missional MOTIVATED GIVING.

Grace motivated giving is a response to God's grace and the example of how Christ gave of Himself. HE GAVE HIMSELF FULLY to accomplish His Mission - Jesus didn't tithe himself.

"For the joy set before him, He endured the cross, despising the shame."

His self-sacrifice was built in as INFRASTRUCTURE to his life on earth.

How should His self-sacrifice impact our generosity?

In some way the INFRASTRUCTURE of our personal budget should reflect His generosity and Mission.

Jesus lived in light of eternity, and that is what happened to the Thessalonians - v. 10-12

Turning from idols of this world to serving the true living God will have an impact on how we act as stewards of what God has given us.

Why do we talk about these areas Giving and Serving? Because if we don't then we get caught in the cultural current of "it's all about me". Those practices of engaging help us fight the normal drift of the flesh and of the culture to pursue personal peace and affluence - "let me alone, let me get what I can, can what I get, and sit on my can". If we don't intentionally build an infrastructure into our lives that incorporates these habits, then we'll get caught in the rip tide of the world. The way to get out is to swim in a different way.

When it comes to giving, how does this play itself out?

WARNING:LISTENER DISCRETION IS ADVISED

- the following content will be upsetting to some - for different reasons

Wherever we are in our giving habits, scripture and the example of Jesus will challenge us to step out in faith, love, and hope.

The reality is that we are all in this ministry together, and it takes all of us to make it happen.

HEAR this....The situation is not immediately critical, but if we continue on the same trajectory for the next few years we run the risk of slowly reducing our opportunities to serve our church body, the community, and the other ministries that we support.

Most of this message has been oriented toward MEMBERS, but if you are a regular attender and you benefit from some aspect of ministry here, then we appreciate all you do as well to help keep it going forward.

SO HOW DO WE RESPOND?

1 Thess 2:4 ..."God who examines our hearts". Jesus tells us that our treasure and our hearts are linked so if we're serious about seeing grace grip our hearts then at SOME point, we must address how we handle our treasure.

Grace sets us free - no more boxes to check so we're free to check our hearts.

FIRST audit your heart, then your checkbook.

Your heart and treasure are linked and will find common ground.
