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Dear friends in Christ,

We are currently in the middle of a series of messages about what God has to say to us about our earthly possessions. Before we get back into this, I have some bad news and I have some good news. The good news is that even though I have been telling you that we will be on this topic for 7 weeks. I decided to shorten it to five weeks. That means today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of what is now a five week series about money. I don't think anyone will be upset that I'm doing this... that's the good news. The bad news is that what I'm doing is in this sermon I'm packing in what we could talk about in three sermons down to one single sermon. This is bad news because we won't be able to talk about things in as much detail, and it's bad because I run the risk of overwhelming you with information so that your mind ends up taking nothing from the sermon. But the three things we're talking about are so closely related, and they're really underneath a single overriding truth, I don't think that's going to happen. So let's get at it.

Two weeks ago, we talked about the big idea that we have to keep in mind about our earthly possessions. Everything we have is actually God's. He is the owner. It is simply under our control for a short period of time, then we'll die, and someone else will control the earthly wealth that was under our care. Because we are managers of God's stuff for such a short time, we need to be very shrewd, very wise, very intentional in how we use what he has entrusted to our care. And as we manage it, we must always have an eye toward the next life... a life that goes on forever and ever. How can I leverage this earthly stuff I'm managing to make the maximum impact in eternity?

With that base, last week we began to answer the question: "So if I'm a manager and God is the owner, how does the owner want me to use his stuff?" What we learned last week is that we honor the Owner... we honor God... when we give him our very best. The offering we give back to God comes off the top. It's first before all other things we spend money on. Why?

- Because it is an expression of trust and dependency on God who gave us these things in the first place.
- Because it honors God and gives him glory.
- Because it's good for us... not because he needs the money. He's doing just fine without us.
- Finally, we give offerings of thanksgiving for our God, knowing that we facilitating the spread of the Gospel here in Omaha, in North America, and around the world. When we give offerings, we are influencing matters of eternal importance.

Today we continue to answer the question: "How does the Owner want me to use the earthly possessions he has temporarily entrusted to my care?" The answer to this question is found in

**1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.**

Show love for others, the reading tells us. One way we will show love is with by helping others with their earthly needs. Why should we do that? Whom should we help? Let's find the answers.

LAW: Self interest. The truth is, selflessly helping others is something that is exceedingly difficult to us. It comes easier to some more than others. If my wife makes a batch of chocolate chip cookies, she will sometimes share her intention of giving a bunch of them away to someone else. And I object! Hey, how about we just keep them at home and we'll eat them! I have a harder time than my wife in giving. That's one of the reasons God put her in my life. So some have a harder time with this than others.

But then the question is, how much does God require us to love others, or think of others first? The Bible says this: "Love your neighbor..." And what does that mean? Love your neighbor...

- when you want to look good in front of others.
  - When you want to feel better about yourself.
  - When you want them to feel like they owe you... so you get help in the future.
  - When it's convenient and you're not in too much of a rush.
- no, here's what it says:
- Love your neighbor as yourself. That is, love your neighbor, give to your neighbor, help your neighbor every time that you would do that for yourself.

Hmmm. Do we always love like our neighbor as ourselves. And just what is love? What does that mean exactly? Does it just mean to have good feelings toward our neighbor? Your neighbor calls at 11pm and says, "Say, my furnace just went out!" And you say, "Wow, that's terrible! I feel bad for you and your family. Well... good luck with that!"

What did our reading say:

**This is how we know** [personal knowledge, experience. Not theoretical, but experiential.] **what love is: Jesus Christ laid down** [something done freely of your own accord] **his life for us.**

What does it mean to love others? God doesn't leave us in the dark. He defines love for us. No, actually, he shows us what love looks like. Because the truth is, love is a verb. Love is an action. Love GIVES. Love gives what? Love gives how much? Love gives anything and everything right up to our very life. What do you have that is more valuable than your life? Nothing!

**And we ought** [owe; have a debt] **to lay down our lives for our brothers.** Love your neighbor as yourself. What is love? It's not an emotion, it's an action. Love by giving. Giving what? Giving anything and everything right up to your very life. If we're willing to go to that extreme, then we will certainly give less than our very life if that is all that is needed. And that's why John says:

**If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity** [doesn't feel for him; affection; empathy; such that they are moved to love by giving] **on him, how can the love of God be** [remain; stay; continue to exist; keep on] **in him? Dear children** [affection!], **let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.** [Let's not just talk about love and pay it lip service, let's DO it. Let's show it. And that means if our neighbor is in need, we give.

But who is my neighbor that God wants me to help with my earthly possessions? The Bible specifically mentions three categories.

- Family: **1 Tm 5:8; If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

God says help your family... both immediate and extended. Immediate family is the easiest to help. But we hear of stories of neglect some times, don't we? Maybe the neglect of

our family's material needs isn't severe enough to make the local news. But do you indulge your pleasures or vices or hobbies or interests, but neglect some needs in your family? And needs include food, clothing, shelter, education, transportation and more. What about extended family?

- Poor: Another category of people we ought to help is in Galatians 2:10 Paul was at the first church convention, sharing his missionary work, and making sure all were on the same page and in agreement with the preaching he was doing, especially among the Gentiles. The church was in agreement. And then Paul says: **“All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”** God wants us to help and support the poor. Do you use what God has entrusted to you to support those who are in need, who have come across bad times?
- Christians: Among the poor and needy, God doesn't want us to treat believers and unbelievers alike: Galatians 6:10 **“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”** Just as family is a priority for the believer... take care of family first... so also our spiritual family is a priority. Take care of those who are your brothers and sisters in the faith.
- Finally, the Bible also specifically mentions helping those who share the Word of God with you. But I think we can include that with last week's lesson on giving our best back to God first.

Did you notice one category missing? I couldn't find any passages that say, “Be sure to provide for your own needs. When you are needy, help yourself.” Why? Because we do that automatically! We do that in excess already. Instead it's the benchmark by which we measure our love for others. Love your neighbor... how much? As you love yourself. As you take care of meeting your own needs, so also take care of the needs of your family... of the poor..., of fellow believers... of those who share the word of God to you.

Are you getting a clearer idea in your head of how God wants you to use the earthly wealth he has entrusted to your care?

Now let me ask you this. Have you identified times and situation when you haven't and don't use the earthly wealth God has entrusted to your care to help your neighbor? Maybe you've found ways in the past

- to justify it this sin against God. “Well no one helped me when I had a need, so now I'm not going to help.)...)
- or rationalize it (sure I have enough to day and could help, but I don't know what tomorrow will bring!)...)
- or you just plain don't think about it.

The OWNER is calling on us today to confess. To stop hiding our sin. To acknowledge that we have not used our possessions in line with how he wants us to use them in that we have not always used our world possessions to help those around us. Take that sin to God. Confess it. Be honest. Ask for his forgiveness.

Then know this. **“We know what love is because Christ Jesus laid down his life for us.”** Christ Jesus, God's own Son, came to our filthy, corrupt planet. The holy Son of God lived among us. He lived FOR us. And at the right time, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. He laid down his life for you. Our holy God demanded that your life be ripped from you for your failure to love as he has loved. He demanded you punished for mismanaging the earthly wealth he has placed in your care... for *not* always adequately taking care of your family and relatives. For not

helping the poor and needy. For not having compassion for your brothers and sisters in Christ when they were in need. For all of this, Jesus laid down his life. That is, he willingly and purposefully gave what was dearest and most costly for you to meet the greatest, most critical need you have ever had. He gave what was his: a holy life. He took from you that which was dragging you to hell: your life of selfishness and rebellion. In that glorious exchange, he has made you flooded you with his riches and became poor for your sake. Praise God for his incredible generosity, for his true love which supplied you in our time of need exactly what we were lacking so that we are in Christ now holy, blameless, pure and fit for heaven!

How can we thank him? As he has loved you, now love and help your neighbor. As a manager of earthly possessions God has entrusted to your care he wants you to 1) Give him your first and best (that was last week's sermon.) and he wants you to 2) love your family, fellow believers and the poor with real actions... by giving some of your earthly possessions to meet their earthly needs.

In doing so, you will be pouring out the love of God, and when the love of God is poured out, it changes lives both now and eternity.

May God make us faithful managers of the earthly wealth he entrusted to our care. Amen.