

Please pray with me. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Good Morning!

Today we continue our series focused on a Wonder-full life here within the Saint James faith community... where we are loving and serving God and God's People.

Last week Pastor Pat spoke about looking into our heart and our vision for our presence and our impact in the world. Truly, looking in to how we 'spend' our assets of time, energy, and money so that we approach life with attentiveness and intentionality.

Today we will reflect on our outer manifestation mindset regarding our money practices and possessions and how we use them. Are we truly looking out for others, and being mindful of the well-being of others?

Let's face it, money, possessions and stuff can really grab a hold of us. Many individuals and families are functioning as if God does not exist – seeking happiness through the possession of “the best of things”, driven by selfish desire. Like me, I'm sure that many of you can think back on something that you purchased or an investment that you made only to regret it later.

Several years ago, I owned a small benefits consulting firm which my business partner and I sold to a Corporation. I continued working with the Company in a well-paying leadership role. I was accumulating a lot of material “stuff” – I must confess I had so many clothes, shoes, and jewelry that we turned one of our guest bedrooms into a walk-in closet.

I was working 60-70-hour weeks, traveling all over the Country, in an effort to gain new clients, which meant more income. I became somewhat obsessed in squirreling away enough savings to have a HUGE “security blanket” for the unknown future. I call it the “what if” “worry” trap.

I had a very successful career, however it also brought me further and further from God and my family. I was not taking time for spiritual reflection, nor was I consistently looking out for the needs of others.

At one point I realized that I couldn't keep going. I was having difficulty sleeping and living with how I was living. Frankly I was done with living for my own success and security – it was only leaving me tired and hopeless.

One sleepless night, I picked up my devotional and the day's message was a prayer: It read: Father, since Jesus will not fill those who are full of themselves, I want to accept any experience you may allow in my life to empty me of my self-interest.

The next morning, I flew to corporate headquarters to attend a Board Meeting. The President of my division started the meeting by providing a brief introduction of each team member. When it was time to share a few things about me, EVERY sentence was about MONEY – how I had exceeded revenue goals, broken long-standing new business numbers, and was forecasted to continue these trends. There was NO mention of my long-standing client relationships, my passion and success as a mentor, or even my dedication to corporate wide community outreach projects.

Suddenly, the thought crossed my mind - If the words that were just shared about me was my eulogy, I would be so ashamed, for I would never want to be remembered in this manner. I was numb, I even felt dirty, you might say. And honestly, I don't remember the remainder of the meeting. Instead of joining the team for dinner that night, I went back to the hotel and booked the first flight home. Upon arriving home, Bob took one look at me and said, "I'm not surprised to see you, did you resign", for which my response was a resounding, "YES"!

You see, God took me down to bring me back up, to restore me - and I was desperate to fully understand how to completely depend on him, freeing me to be more generous than ever with ALL OF my possessions, including my money as well as my time and talents. I also now realize, the prayer I stumbled on that sleepless night didn't show up by accident - that was God's way of getting my attention to live for his purposes – I needed to switch from material goals to eternal goals. We can serve God or possessions, but not both!

I now no longer work those grueling hours, instead, I am a Servant of God. I live and breathe the first and second Commandment, to Love God, and love thy neighbor as thyself. And neighbor isn't just those that live on either side of me or across the street, but ANYONE GOD PUTS IN MY PATH - including the person that cuts me off on the highway, or the individual that doesn't share the same beliefs

as I. Agape love is all about giving not getting – it’s unconditional and sacrificial. I truly believe, that everyone deserves to be seen through the eyes of love. And kindness is never based on “getting” or “owing”.

In our scripture lesson today, Timothy was not just to talk about the dangers of money. His ultimate aim was to lay out a different, a better path – the kind of path that fits with the gospel. In this passage there are three important points, which say something about God through our view or handling of money:

1. God is our hope, not money – To “hope in God” means that he is your supply, your provision, and your security.
2. Everything is a gift from God – God has provided richly! God is not against rich provisions; after all he is the one who made these things possible. Don’t miss this!
3. Generosity is the natural response to God – You cannot just be thankful to God. True gratitude expresses itself in generosity toward others. Have you ever been motivated by guilt in giving? You know that it doesn’t work. In fact, God doesn’t need our money, and he doesn’t like a regretful giver (2 Cor: 9:7). Positively, it means that giving helps our heart believe in God. It is an act of faith. Our soul, view of money, and practice of giving are linked, giving reflects a greater joy. I love the last part of verse 19 – “so that they may take hold of that which is truly life”.

It’s hard to believe that this week marks the fifth anniversary of what is now one of the best days of my life – the day I “let it go”, and chose to no longer live a life suffocated by possessions, but rather filled with the life of Jesus. The journey has had its ups and downs, and at times, have I been afraid, absolutely! During this time God has taken me to the “school of faith and trust” which has truly been an amazing spiritual growth experience. Through scripture, he has taught me that Godly Stewardship Means surrendering, and recognizing that I am a Manager, not Owner of all I have, not even my body.

I am RICHLY blessed, not because of money and possessions, but because of the many things money and possessions can’t buy.

I recently caught up with a friend that I hadn’t seen in over 4 years. She asked me what updates I had made to our home since she last saw us. When my response was NONE, she was so shocked she repeated the question! I smiled and replied, “Karen, actually there are changes in our home, there is more unconditional love,

laughter, joy, comfort and living in the moment than you could ever imagine - I *than* proceeded to share pictures of our pups – Max and Gracie!

As in the story “It’s a Wonderful Life, let’s get the story right – lets reap love and generosity not bitterness and resentment!

I leave you with one of my favorite quotes from Francis of Assisi - Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received – only what you have given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.

Amen.