



GIVE IT ALL YOU'VE GOT!

Stewardship Week 1



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“GIVING GOD OUR BEST”

That hymn we just sang -- “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” is one of the greatest hymns of the Church, and each stanza of that hymn ends with the refrain: “Crown him Lord of all.” And according to the person who wrote this sermon, someone has pointed out, and it makes sense, that unless we crown Christ “Lord of all,” we cannot crown Christ Lord at all. What does this mean? Lord, is generally the word used to mean God in the Bible.

The dictionary defines Lord as “one having power and authority over others; a ruler by hereditary right or preeminence to whom service and obedience are due. Of course there others -- like the archaic, male head of the household; or the feudal tenant whose power came directly from the king. It would make a fascinating study.

So, how do we live if God is the Lord of our lives? Are there any guidelines for using all our resources and opportunities in order to **give God our best?**

I think it’s safe to say that most of us don’t hunger and thirst after righteousness nearly as much as God would like. The news we see on TV or read in the newspapers, distorted relationships among people we see and know, and the anxieties that make up too much of our lives; these all confirm that we’re not **giving God our best**. It is also true, however, that all of us have times when we’d like to do and be what God intends. Like Moses, I think we really want to, but God asks so much of us.... It’s hard...

Sometimes we do try, with some success, to **give God our best**; sometimes we do what is good and right. There are cooperative efforts like extended table; strengthened relationships from reaching out to others, and the peace and joy that come from those efforts. In light of these observations, then, a sermon on **giving God our best**, is neither irrelevant nor silly; it's important and needed, and, in our best moments, wanted.

As Christians who desire to **give God our best**, we live in response to God's goodness to us. We believe that life has been given to us by God. The Bible begins with, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth"* (Genesis 1:1). The psalmist affirms, *"The Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it"* (Psalm 24:1). And God didn't just create the world and everything in it and then just leave us to our own devices. God provides resources in nature that continue to serve our needs. God gives us intelligence, reason, and ingenuity that we use for the betterment of the world given to us. God is intimately involved with us every day and promises to watch over us: *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*³⁰ *And even the hairs of your head are all counted.*³¹ *So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.* (Matthew 10:29-31).

Most important of all, he gave us the Son, Jesus, so that we might be forgiven. In the words of Philippians 2:6-7, Jesus, who is God, did not, *"though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a*

slave...” And God calls us to **give God our best** as servants who put ourselves last.

As Christians, we are realists who believe that the resources of our lives should be used, not as we might desire, but to do the will of the one who created us and the universe. We also believe, more significantly, that all of creation, including human life, is good. In the Bible’s account of Creation, we read after each phase of creation, God saw that it was good, and after all had been completed, God looked at all of it and saw that *“it was very good”* (Genesis 1:31).

Through our disobedience and free will, the world that God created “good” has been filled with sin. We have not been good stewards of the resources God has given us, and we have not put others first. We have neglected his command to continue his mission of seeking and saving the lost. We live in a fallen world. We can just give up and spend our time just waiting for our time on earth to be over, or we can **give it all we’ve got** as we respond to the love of God who certainly gives us all he’s got!

A young couple had two children – a girl, ten, and a boy, eight. The children had wanted to go to Disneyworld for a long time. Finally, their parents had saved up enough money so the family could afford to fly that long distance and spend three nights and two days at Disneyworld. The children had a wonderful time and, when the vacation was over, naturally, they didn’t want to leave! But they couldn’t afford that, so they flew back

home. You see, those kids had a choice: they could be resentful because they only got two days, or they could be grateful to their parents who had made it possible for them to spend the time they had had. As the great 20th century philosopher, Theodor Geisel said, “Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.”

Isn’t their circumstance similar to our lives? A marriage that started out so full of promise ends in divorce. A child who is the light of her parents’ lives contracts a fatal illness. We can spend our lives in self-pity and bitterness because life isn’t going according to our plans and hopes, or we can be grateful because God has given us days that are filled with good things. As Christians, who know that the God who has created us is with us through all the joys and trials of life, we can **give God our best** no matter what our circumstances are.

We are called to **give God our best** in the way we live our lives. If we are employees, we are called to give a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay. If we’re employers, we are to give a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. We are called to **give God our best** in our relationships, and in our community responsibilities. Jesus said, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them . . . Much like a fruit tree – it’s fulfilled when it produces fruit, “whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19). Jesus’ redemption brings us a certain*

freedom from the law; it brings us the freedom to live our lives under the new law of love.

We are called to **give God our best** in the way we serve others. When Jesus talked about the final judgment, he said it will be God saying to us, *“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me”* (Matthew 25:40). We are to **give God our best** as we serve others, just as *“the Son of Man, [Jesus], did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:28).

We are called to **give God our best** in our willingness to sacrifice our own wants, even needs, even our lives should that be required. Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it”* (Luke 9:23-24). Jesus brought this message home to us through the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. He told of a traveler beaten by thieves and left to die along the road. Both a priest and a Levite passed by *“on the other side.”* Not so the Samaritan who risked the same fate, putting himself in a vulnerable position by stopping, tending the traveler’s wounds, and then placing the victim on his own donkey and taking him to an inn for further care.

Yes, the expectation is to **give God our best**, just as God did in giving us his best, his own Son. The focus, however, is not just on those that we

are to help, to serve, to give to, but it is also on us. Do we learn more about the victim who received the care or about the Samaritan who helped him?

The focus is on us, who, when we **give God our best**, are carrying out what we have been created to do! As Paul points out in Ephesians, *“It is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith – and this not from [our]selves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”* Our salvation has been won for us by our Savior Jesus. Now comes our response to that gift: *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Ephesians 2:8-10). As we do those deeds God has created us to do, we surely **give God our best**, and our lives are evidence that we indeed “crown him Lord of all.”

Amen.