



More Than
STONE SOUP

A Stewardship and Giving Emphasis Program for Congregations

WHY ESTIMATE OUR GIVING?

Next week on Celebration Sunday, each of us will be asked to complete an Estimate of Giving Card. As the time approaches, it is good to revisit the purpose in this exercise.

Present New Testament understanding of stewardship comes from the Apostle Paul. In his letters to the believers at Corinth, Paul provides a sound theological foundation for stewardship and giving. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians:

“Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

From this we understand that giving is to be carefully planned, and not left to chance. We are to consciously and deliberately decide upon a regular amount of our income that is to be allocated to giving. The amount set aside should be proportionate to our income, and should be systematically set aside each time our paycheck arrives.

Our calling is to be “first fruits” givers, giving to God first, and then managing the remainder to our benefit. This is so contrary to our current culture’s teaching to “spend the best—and hoard the rest.” But, Paul’s position is very clear; God comes first.

In his second letter to Corinth, Paul tells of the attitude with which the Macedonians approach giving—and the joy that was theirs in giving. Paul writes:

“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Sunday morning is not the time to quickly determine the amount we will give. Estimating our giving is one method for the deliberate planning of our stewardship. It meets the criteria Paul established for faithful giving, and keeps with the concept of giving willingly and eagerly out of love.

What goes into our offering envelope is described as a test of the sincerity of our love. That makes our giving far more serious an issue than can be left to spur of the moment decisions, perhaps decisions based on the amount of our “leftovers.” We put God first when we plan and estimate our giving. It’s good theology and it’s a good way to live.