

LOVING GOD THROUGH FAITHFUL GIVING—

Loving God and Neighbor

Deuteronomy 6:1-12; Mark 12:28-34

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/loving-god-and-neighbor/>

This opening portion, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone,” is called the *shema*, the ancient Jewish prayer, repeated by the faithful every morning and every evening. If you recognize these verses, that means you’re paying attention. Two weeks ago, we discussed Jesus’ quote from Mark 12:29-31, citing this famous First Testament passage.

This sermon text might seem like a stretch—a sermon on stewardship when the biblical text used does not even mention money, giving or stewardship. But that’s the point. Too many of our discussions about wisely using God’s resources (time, talent, treasure) begin there. Today, we want to burrow deeper. Going down to the root, to what we really love and to our primary relationship with God.

God, our one loyalty. One LORD, one love. Repeat that with me. One LORD, one love. To love God with all of our strength implies loving God with our wishes and desires. To love God with intentionality (vv. 6-9), to constantly keep God in front of ourselves and our children, so that this relationship with the Lord cannot keep from impacting our choices with money, time and talents.

Here’s a reminder: Moses has led the Israelites out of slavery and is now ready to send them over to the Promised Land. The Book of Deuteronomy is collection of Moses’s sermons as he sends them on, a fresh application of the earlier books, Exodus and Leviticus. At this point in Moses’ sermon, you can almost hear someone in the congregation, “Well, I love God and neighbor. But really, what does that have to do with my financial generosity? After all, I achieved my success all by myself and I expect everyone else to do the same.” Really? Listen carefully. The root of our failure to share our financial blessings is ingratitude and the root of ingratitude is believing the lie that we did all this ourselves. Read vv. 10-12. Since you’re self-made, I guess when you see an open parking spot with 30 minutes left on the meter, you always go park somewhere else, because you are a self-made success, right? You also grow your own food, milk your own cow, cause the sun to come up and keep the earth spinning on its axis, right?

Becoming a follower of Jesus means we enter a new relationship with things. Loving God and neighbor will sooner or later show in concrete ways. It begins in our hearts, works itself out of our arms, fingers, right onto our wallets, debit cards, checks (if we still use them), or right out of the end of your fingers to our smart phones to mobile giving or Apple Pay.

C.S. Lewis never talked about percentages of giving. He said the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. Our giving should pinch us, hamper us a bit. Then we know it’s love. Do you

ever spend more money than is logical or practical on someone? A pet, child, grandchild or boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse? It's because of love.

It is no accident that children and grandchildren are mentioned in our text (vv. 2, 7). Loving God through faithful giving creates our legacy, something which stands long after we're gone. Through our gifts, we create our life's echo effect, reverberating through the ages. I remind you of something I mentioned during our Setting Sail visioning process: The children being born into our church right now will live into the 22nd century! God has given us this legacy opportunity, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Moses was preaching this sermon to the Hebrew people, they stood on the verge of entering the Promised Land. Above all, Moses wanted them to remain free. He wanted their lives to be noble, to count for something, to have purpose. Richard Stearns once said, "Money, job and status don't give purpose to life. It's God who gives purpose to money, jobs and status." You see, someday, everything we think we own is going to be pried from our cold, dead hands, and what will matter is loving God and neighbor—relationships. The only things that will last are not the things we keep, but what we give. In Jesus' name, Amen!