

TOGETHER
Bearing Fruit That Will Last

October 27, 2019

**Youth and Adult Bible Study Jay Wolf and
Kenny Hoomes**

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” – John 15:5

Background Passages

Matthew 6:19-33; John 15:1-11

Focal Bible Passages

Matthew 6:19-33; John 15:5

Central Bible Truth

In this world of selfish TAKERS, be a Christ-like GIVER.

Teaching Aim

To help learners become faithful stewards and to identify ways they can personally be involved in making our Stewardship Emphasis a success.

Teaching Outline

TOGETHER Bearing Fruit That Will Last

- **Our Problem** **Matthew 6:19-24**
- **God’s Perspective** **Matthew 6:25-32**
- **Our Priority** **Matthew 6:33**
- **God’s Provision** **John 15:5**

TOGETHER
Bearing Fruit That Will Last
Youth/Adult Bible Fellowship Lesson
October 27, 2019
Jay Wolf and Kenny Hoomes

Introduction

I once heard an interesting story of a young United Way volunteer who was serving in a town similar in size to Montgomery. The United Way director was conducting research on some of the leading citizens of the town, when it was discovered that a particular wealthy individual had given nothing to any charity organization over the past ten years. This young volunteer quickly asked if he could go and talk with the wealthy individual and hopefully convince him to make a donation to United Way. The director granted the volunteer permission.

Once arriving at the wealthy man's home, the young volunteer quickly began to move toward the goal of the visit. "Sir," he stated, "our research has revealed that you make more than a million dollars a year and yet you give nothing to charity." The businessman interrupted, "Well, let me ask you this, does your research reveal that I have an elderly mother who is dying of a terrible disease and her medical bills are three times her income?" "No sir," replied the volunteer. "Does your research reveal that I have a brother who is a veteran, blind, and confined to a wheelchair?" "No sir," again replied the volunteer. "Well then, does your research reveal I have a sister whose husband was tragically killed in an automobile accident and left her penniless with three small children?" Once more and now very humbled the volunteer replied, "No sir." "Well," replied the businessman, "I'll tell you this, if I don't give anything to them, I'm sure not giving anything to you!"

We laugh, but in reality, that's how many people live. You don't have to look very far to observe a selfish, narcissistic, or greedy individual in today's world. Yet, to be honest, we all have these desires within our own lives and we must work to avoid such negative thoughts and actions. As followers of Jesus Christ we are to move from selfishness to serving and from taking to giving. The apostle Paul said it this way, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" – 2 Corinthians 5:17. Therefore, here is the point: **In this world of selfish takers, be a Christ-like giver.** At the heart of that thought is love. You see the Bible tells us in John chapter three that, "God so loved the world that he gave . . ." You see my friend, God connects loving to giving and so should we.

Today here at First Baptist Church we begin our 2019 Stewardship Emphasis as we prepare to pledge our 2020 ministry budget. Each year there are individuals that feel uncomfortable when we begin to discuss stewardship, but my friend, let me remind you that such feelings are neither needed or healthy. Being faithful in giving is simply a small tangible way we can express our love to God, while being good stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

So, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are to be “made new” as we rearchitect our basic worldview and realign ourselves with God’s perspective. The entire idea of moving from being a “taker” to a Christ-like “giver” is a process of transformation. Maybe as a child, you took a magnet and attached a piece of steel to the magnet for a long period of time. What happened was that through the process of repolarization, the piece of steel became magnetic because it had been attached to the magnet. And in much the same way, our transformation as good stewards comes as we attach ourselves to Jesus and allow His love to pass through our lives and transform us from selfish takers to magnetic Christ-like givers.

You may ask, “How can this process of transformation take place?” We find the answer in God’s Word. Today we will look at Jesus’ teachings from a portion of The Sermon on the Mount and in His discussions with His disciples in John’s gospel.

Our Problem (Matthew 6:19-24)

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

In a word, our problem is selfishness. As followers of Jesus Christ, we know full well that His words in Matthew 6:33 are key to life. Jesus proclaimed that we are to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” and yet, we have a natural proclivity to do the opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God in his teachings and yet, we tend to listen to our own selfish desires and seek the kingdom of the world. We follow our natural pull and from the cradle to the grave or from the nursery to the nursing home, we seek our own way.

As believers we must hear God’s warnings in scripture. The apostle Paul admonished us to, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in

humility consider others better than yourselves.” – Philippians 2:3. Likewise, James stated, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.” – James 4:1-2. These scripture passages and many others provide a sad commentary on the human condition.

In 1954 William Golding penned his classic novel, *Lord of the Flies* and captured the essence of the depravity of humankind. The prize-winning book focuses on a group of British boys stranded on an uninhabited island and their disastrous attempt to govern themselves. Instead of a society like Mayberry with Andy and Barney, the boys devolve into selfish savages. Golding helps the reader see that we are all capable of anything when we follow our own desires with no fear of consequences.

The question for believers in the twenty-first century is: Will we live with a clinched fist or an open hand? A clinched fist is a sign of selfishness, defiance, or fear. An open hand is disarming, friendly and inviting. When God confronted Moses in Exodus 4, He asked, “What do you have in your hand, Moses?” Moses’ rod was a symbol of his security and his identity and yet, God told Moses to “throw it down.” Moses could not withdraw to his own selfishness but rather was required to fully rely upon God. What is in your hand today that you need to release to God?

One final word about having a closed fist comes from a story about trapping monkeys in the Congo. Trappers have a unique technique whereby they take a gourd and cut a small opening just the right size for a monkey’s hand to slip inside. Then the trapper places peanuts inside the gourd, ties the gourd to the monkey’s tree and moves out of sight. The monkey smells the peanuts, comes down, and places his paw inside the gourd and grabs a handful of peanuts. However, due to the size of the hole in the gourd, the monkey cannot remove his closed fist, nor will the monkey let go of the peanuts. The trapper simply approaches the trapped monkey and captures him for his own purposes. My friend, don’t be trapped by the things of this world, less you become victim to the enemy’s purposes. Rather, live your life in such a way that you become a Kingdom seeker.

God’s Perspective (Matthew 6:25-32)

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body; what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to this life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow?

They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Selfishness leads to worry. Worry can totally consume your life if you don't keep things in God's perspective. Therefore, as followers of Jesus Christ we must realign our perspective with God's truth. This concept requires moving from selfishness to serving and from taking to giving. The ultimate goal in life is not to have a Super Bowl ring or a seat in the Oval Office; nor is the goal a giant bank account, a big house, or a trophy spouse. Rather, the treasure is to know Jesus and extend His Kingdom through love, purity, and serving.

Corrie ten Boom understood God's perspective. After years in a German concentration camp, observing hundreds of people die (including her sister), Corrie understood service over selfishness and faith over worry. She gave all she had and all she could to extend God's Kingdom. Corrie stated, "Everything that comes to my hand, I'll lose. Everything I place in God's hand I'll have forever. So don't measure your life by its duration but by your donation." Thus, we must freely give of all the Lord has entrusted to us because, you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. Let that sink in, you can send money ahead as an ultimate heavenly IRA or 401K! It's like trading one dollar of the earth's ephemeral currency for one hundred times the amount of heaven's currency!

In this passage, Jesus compares how selfish humans worry over material wants and needs. In doing so, He compares our response to that of a bird. Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or stow away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." - (v 26) It was this passage that God used at a pivotal moment in the life of Liz Huntley. Today, Liz is a prominent attorney in a prestigious law firm in Birmingham, Alabama, but that was not always the case. Liz basically grew up in Clanton, Alabama living with her grandmother after her drug addicted mother committed suicide. In her book, *More Than a Bird*, Liz shares the story of her life of poverty and abuse. It was when her pastor used Matthew 6:26 that she began to understand God's love and care for her. Pastor Elijah Good stated to Liz, "If God will take care of the fowls of the air, then He will certainly take care of His children because they are more than birds." God provides the resources we need, just as He provides for the birds of the air. Yet, like the birds we must do our part by trusting in God's promise and being responsible stewards of what He has entrusted to us. The apostle Paul said it this way, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." - 1 Timothy 6:17. This then is God's perspective.

Our Priority (Matthew 6:33)

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Verse 33 should serve as a rudder for our lives for when we follow its teachings all things will fall into place. What is your “real” priority in life? Is it seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? My friend, if we are not careful, we tend to give ourselves credit for things we don’t do. For example, we may think about exercising and check that off our list. Or we may be guilty of thinking about following Jesus’ teachings and simply checking that off our “to do” list as well. Don’t fool yourself, but rather evaluate what your priority is in life. Take a look at your check book and your calendar and evaluate how you spend your time and money; these reveal our true priority of life. Do you need to reprioritize? Then become a Christ Centered Kingdom driven person today. James writes, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves, do what it says.” – James 1:22.

God’s Provision John 15:5

“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

The vine was a favorite designation for Israel in the Old Testament (Isaiah 5:1; Jeremiah 2:21a; Hosea 10:1; Ezekiel 15:1-5; 19:10-11; Psalm 80:8-11). Thus, in claiming to be the *true vine*, Jesus thereby claimed to constitute the true Israel. The basic purpose of the vine-branch analogy was to describe an abiding relationship between Christ and the believer which, like that earlier between Israel and Yahweh, was intended to bear more fruit (cf. Isaiah 5:2; Hosea 10:1).

God’s provision for us should remind us of how dearly He holds each of us in His loving arms. As believers, we are connected to Him just as a vine is connected to the branch, and when we abide in a loving relationship with Jesus, we can bear much fruit.

Loving leads to giving; giving leads to stewardship; stewardship leads to discipleship; and discipleship leads to bearing fruit. When this truth is realized, no longer are church members uncomfortable talking about tithes and offerings. You see, my job as your pastor is to serve as a dynamic coach of a group of dynamic disciples that understand because He gave, we too must give.

One last thought is that a tangible way we can be good stewards of God's provision is by participating in our Stewardship Emphasis here at First Baptist Church. For our 2019-2020 Stewardship Emphasis, prayerful planning began months ago. Now after much prayer, thought, and counting the cost, our church has approved our 2020 ministry budget of \$6,905,000.

However, the way we truly vote for our budget is with our pledge card. Historically, we have pledged our budget to help in counting the cost and knowing what funds should be available to meet the needs. It is a part of our spiritual DNA and a part of our planning process. As believers we give out of gratitude and pledge to plan.

By completing this commitment card, we make a faith promise to God and reflect our priority to expand God's Kingdom by fueling God's work. It is the ultimate investment because you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead! Together we are bearing fruit that will last.