

Good morning everyone, my name is Shane Gould, and I serve as one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance. As I think about it already being December and Christmas being only a few weeks away, I inevitably start thinking about gifts. Giving is a big part of the way we celebrate Christmas.

Now, for the most part, that's a really good and positive thing. But if you're a typical middle-aged male, like myself, there are few things more paralyzing or daunting than the thought of shopping for Christmas gifts. I'm told that if you're willing to spend the money, there are professionals who will shop for you. No woman in her right mind would ever consider entrusting someone else with this sacred task, but a man would if he thought it would work. Men will do almost anything to escape having to shop for gifts. We will delegate shopping to our wife, or maybe a sister. We will even enlist our children if we have to...*'go buy your mother something that I can give her for Christmas.'* I would like to be able to say that I stand apart in this regard, but I can't. I have to confess that I am one of those men you see frantically wandering the mall on December 24, wide-eyed and desperate! Despite all the stress, we are determined to show our love or appreciation for someone by giving them something.

As challenging as it can be to present someone with a gift, there is something moving in both the giving and the receiving of a gift when it is done with the right heart. Giving is a powerful love language.

One of the first ways Jesus was worshipped was being given gifts. In worship, Magi from the east brought Jesus precious gifts to honour him at his birth:

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."¹

¹ Matthew 2:10-11

In bowing down to Jesus, the Magi opened their treasures to Him. They presented him with costly gifts as an expression of their worship. These were not small, token gifts. They were treasure: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Frankincense and myrrh were precious substances used to make incense, harvested from the sap of rare trees only found east of Israel in modern day Yemen and parts of Somalia. So rare were frankincense and myrrh that they were commodities known to be worth more than their literal weight in gold. Moses in the Book of Exodus was instructed by God to use myrrh and frankincense to make incense for worship and to perfume oil for the anointing of the priests.² In the gifts the Magi brought Jesus, we see the reflection of the worship.

The Magi presented Jesus treasure of great monetary value in their worship to him. Their gifts of worship expressed Jesus' worth as a prophet, a priest, and a divine king. But their gifts also very practically supplied Mary and Joseph with the financial means for their escape and several year exile in Egypt as they fled Herod's campaign to find and murder Jesus. In worship, the Magi bowed their hearts and opened their treasure to Jesus.

For the last number of weeks, we have been looking at what worship as something three dimensional. So far, we have seen that worship, when it is authentic, is something that touches the whole of our lives. Worship is about our relationship with God, and our relationship with our neighbour, it's about our work, and it's even about our wallets.

Randy Alcorn writes, "We may try to divorce our faith from our finances, but God sees them as inseparable."

Worship With Your Wallet

Giving, in a material and financial sense, has always been a core expression of worship. Generous giving has always been a love language with God. Worshipping God with our money, with our

² Exodus 30

wallets, is something God has called each of us to do, whether we have a little or a lot.

I have invited Dave and Beth Pettigrew to come and share a little of the way that God has touched their lives with his generosity and the way God has moved them to give...

Dave and Beth Pettigrew

DAVE

"When Shane first asked us to come up and speak on giving we both thought – well that's a bit awkward! What are we going to say? Charitable giving and personal generosity is usually not something you talk about even in small groups let alone in front of so many people.But here we are.....I wish we could say that through thick and thin we have always had the faith that God would provide for us if we gave Him the first 10%, a tithe of our income but that is not the case. There were some times in our past when money was very tight and we gave less. But we believe that the scriptural guideline is !0% as a starting point for giving. And then there is giving above and beyond the tithe. Giving generously to special missionary requests, charity drives, church projects or specific needs we see in the lives of those around us."

BETH

"When deciding what to share we began to think about all the JOY that WE have experienced through giving, and the JOY experienced by the RECIPIENTS of the gifts and the joy that GOD experiences when we share some of what he has given us, we began to realize that perhaps giving is THE most joyful form of worship that there is! We can share the response of the recipients because of what they have told us. And we can relate to their feelings because of what we have gone through ourselves, personally."

DAVE

"For those of you who don't know us let us just give a bit of our background. We moved to the North Shore 19 years ago in order for me to become a partner with a friend in a small startup business. We came with our 3 young children who are now young adults. Two of

them are now married to wonderful Christian spouses. And then 3 years ago we sold the business and I was able to retire early.

We feel very blessed - in so many ways. But back in 1989 we were a family with three very young children living in Ottawa. We had a small business that failed, leaving us with substantial debts."

BETH

"At that time I hated answering the phone in case it was a creditor wanting money that we owed them but couldn't pay. And each time I went to the mail box I prayed "Lord, please let there be a cheque in the mail" and of course, there wasn't – and then one day there was one – for \$900! It was a tax rebate from the previous year's lack of income – Praise the Lord! Boy it feels great to be able to pay your bills."

DAVE

"And so now that we have been blessed financially we love being able to bless others. A couple of times we've inquired and discovered that someone hadn't been able to pay off their visa bill, so we've paid it. We heard that a young family was struggling to make car payments, so we covered them. We bought soccer boots for the son of a young single mom. We've given restaurant gift certificates, gas gift certificates and helped a family have a vacation. When you are in a financial pinch it is such joy to be able to just pay your bills, or to be able to treat your family on a special occasion."

BETH

"Do you ever think how great a missionary must feel when they discover that someone has signed up to sponsor them at \$20, \$50 or \$100/month or just sent them a cheque ? On a discouraging day it must be such an encouragement to them to know that someone thinks that what they are doing is important, and that they care about them. For those of you who were here last Sunday they played a short clip of a young boy who received a Samaritan's Purse Shoe box who was practically turning himself inside out he was so excited about that gift! – and he hadn't even opened it. That is a great picture of how it feels on the inside when you give a gift that you know means a whole lot to someone. It's also a great picture of the joy the recipient feels and maybe even the joy God experiences when we give generously."

DAVE

"We know that there are many generous people in this congregation who could be up here sharing their experiences with the joy of giving generously. We were just blessed that Shane happened to ask us."

There are many reasons why God wants us to worship him in generous financial giving. But maybe the biggest reason is that we might be like him. As we contemplate worshipping God with our money, we are invited to discover that what we have is really his anyway. And that as we give back to him, we discover that God is someone you can never out give.

Pray. *"Father, this morning we take a moment to contemplate the incredible gift of your Son. You so loved the world, that you gave your one and only Son, the thing most precious to you. Open our hearts this morning. Help us to be like you, generous and full of love. Amen."*

Worship Has A Financial Side

As you read the Bible from beginning to end, you see that worship has always had a financial side to it, that it has always touched the wallet.

Right from the beginning and before the Old Testament Law was ever given, we read about Cain and Abel bringing offerings to God in worship in Genesis chapter 4. Cain brought an offering of crops, while his brother brought the best of his livestock. Later in Genesis 14, we read that Abraham of his own initiative gave God a tenth of all the spoils he had won in battle while rescuing his nephew Lot. There was no written requirement for him to do so, but Abraham chose to recognize God by giving back a tithe.

In bringing the Israelites out of the slavery of Egypt so that they could be free to worship him. God instructed the people through the Law of Moses to give him a tenth of everything they earned through the year. God commanded them to worship him with a portion of their material wealth as a means of teaching them to stay dependent on him in the midst of their newfound freedom. Deuteronomy 14:22-23 reads,

"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always."

As you read on, you see that not only were the Israelites commanded to give God a tenth of all they had, but they were also required to bring God all kinds of offerings and sacrifices over and above their tithe as they sought God's forgiveness for sin and as they made special petitions to him. At the temple, people were to present animals, produce, and precious metals as gifts in sacrifice to God.

Even though the Israelites sang songs and prayed prayers, the core of their worship was expressed in the tangible offerings they brought God on a regular basis. The giving of material wealth has always been an important part of what it means to give God worship.

But as costly as worship may be, material giving never takes the place of the other things God commands for our lives. All the giving in the world can't make up for the love God wants us to have for those around us. As we heard a few weeks ago, unless our giving flows from a heart that is genuinely concerned for the welfare of others and the pursuit of a holy life, God has no desire for our gifts:

"Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"³

Worship Is Costly

Before Jesus, worship was shaped by the Old Testament sacrificial system. It was a costly worship, requiring people to give up valuable livestock, produce, and material wealth.

³ Amos 5:22-24

But the heart behind God's commands was the same as it is today. In requiring his people to give, God was teaching his people to stay dependent on him. Through the worship of their giving, God was supplying for the needs of the poor and even providing for the priests who served him at the temple. Both then and now, God glorifies himself in a multitude of ways, both in us and through us, as we give in worship to him.

With the coming of Jesus, worship has both changed and stayed the same.

Because of Jesus, we are no longer required to offer sacrifices at the temple for our sin. Jesus was God's ultimate sacrifice for sin. Jesus became the sacrifice to end all sacrifices as he gave up his very life as a final offering for our sin. No greater gift has ever been given. So, there is no longer any need for the sin offerings described in the Old Testament – the debt has been paid, once and for all. Hebrews 7:27 reads, *“Unlike the other high priests, [Jesus] does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”*

Because of Jesus, worship is now shaped by what He gave on our behalf at the cross. No longer are God's people bound to the strict regulations of the Law and all its giving requirements. Instead we now worship, *and give*, out of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

A Gospel of Generosity

Even though the worship of the New Testament is completely different from the Old Testament, worship remains wrapped in generous giving. If anything, as you read through the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles, you find a worship characterized by even more giving!

The early church is described in terms of radical generosity. Acts 2:44-47 describes the life of worship that was taking hold of the first followers of Jesus:

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

The lives of the first believers were marked with incredible generosity as things were held in common, where people sold property and possessions in order to meet the needs of others. It was a community of open homes and shared meals as they broke bread, remembering what Jesus' death had accomplished for them. Their hearts were full of joy and praise for God. They were living out the Gospel as a call to generosity.

Jesus had taught the disciples in Matthew 25 that whatever they would give to the poor, would be considered acts of worship to him.

As a missionary, the Apostle Paul went from place to place, ministering and leading people to Jesus, he depended on the generosity of those God was touching to supply for his needs. As he wrote to the believers in the ancient city of Philippi, he wrote these words:

“I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”⁴

Paul wanted these believers to know that the generosity that they were showing him were a fragrant offering to God. Their giving was something that was bringing God worship, like incense at the temple. Paul wanted them to know that as they kept giving, whether to him

⁴ Philippians 4:18-20

or someone else, that God would keep giving back to them. His message to them was, as you give, God is going to meet all your needs according to his eternal riches.

In a letter to Timothy, Paul instructed those with wealth, like the Magi, to open their earthly treasures to present Jesus by generously giving to others:

“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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”⁵

Throughout the scriptures, we see God taking pleasure in the worship of generous giving. *To give as an act of worship is to willingly give away that which we could enjoy for ourselves, that someone else might be blessed and God be honoured.* In that sense, the worship of giving speaks of a greater treasure that we find as we give our wealth away.

Treasure In Heaven or Treasure On Earth?

Jesus spoke of there being two very different kinds of treasure that we can pursue in this life, one being of immeasurably more worth than the other. In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus said,

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

When we live lives of generosity, we not only give God worship, but Jesus also says we store up treasure for ourselves that will be enjoyed for eternity. Jesus addresses the tension each one of us feels

as we are tugged between the treasure of heaven and the treasure of earth.

Jesus says, ‘don’t give in to the appeal of earthly treasure.’ It’s short term. It won’t last. He says, “Don’t store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.” It’s as if Jesus is saying, ‘I know you’re thinking about it. I know you’re tempted to, but don’t! It’s not going to be what you think. It’s not going to last. You’re going to be disappointed. Instead, pursue me. Spend your life and your money on me. That’s where you will find a treasure that will truly last and a treasure that will truly be worth something.

When it comes to money, Jesus says, it’s always one or the other. It’s either treasure in heaven or it’s treasure on earth. You can’t pursue both. A few verses later, Jesus says,

“...No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Jesus Or Mammon

The word Jesus uses for money in this verse is actually the Greek word Mammon. It doesn’t exactly mean money as it has been translated here. It can be more literally translated as the desire for wealth. More literally, Jesus says you cannot serve both God and Mammon. Jesus speaks about the desire for wealth as though it’s a rival god.

The all-consuming desire for wealth can take hold of our lives and become our god if we are not careful. When money becomes the common denominator to our every decision, that is a good indicator that we have begun serving money more than God.

Paul reminds us that many have made money their master, and, in effect, are following a false god who will in the end cause them great grief: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people,

⁵ 1 Timothy 6:17-19

eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"(1 Timothy 6:10).

If worship doesn't touch our wallets, we must ask ourselves who we really worship?

Giving Keeps Us Worshipping

How can we ensure that God is the one we truly worship? Giving. Generous giving strips money of its power over our lives. Giving gives God worship because our goal is not the accumulation of wealth but to see the glory our giving gives God.

To aid the believers in Jerusalem, who were suffering at the time, Paul took up a collection as he traveled through Greece. As people gave, he reminded them of the spiritual results their material giving was producing:

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:12-15)

I want to invite you to worship with your wallet. Not reluctantly. Not under any compulsion. But because you desire to be like God, to be free of Mammon...because you know that as you generously give in Jesus name, "others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else."

To close, I want to bring to your attention a financial need that has come to our attention regarding Geff and Christine Harada.

Many of you know Geff and Christine. They both came to Christ here at North Shore Alliance Church and have become long term missionaries to the Philippines with New Tribes Mission. They have been working to reach the remote Bolo tribe in the northern Philippines, an area that until recently has not been reached with the Gospel.

It has come to our attention over the last few weeks that the Haradas are in a difficult financial situation, as number of their regular donors have dropped off this fall. At the very same time, they have encountered a number of significant unexpected expenses. Some of the expenses they have encountered have been visas for re-entering the country, car repairs, and even temporary evacuation to Manila for a month due to the danger of rebel fighting that was going on near the tribe.

Our Board of Elders and Missions and Outreach Team would like to invite us to pray and consider how God might move us a church family to give to the Haradas. You can give on a one time basis, or perhaps become a new regular supporter of the Haradas.

You may want to consider giving more directly to them through New Tribe Mission's website, ntm.org, as the funds will reach them faster for the sake of the current financial situation that they are in. Simply go to the website and select "Haradas" under "Specific Ministries."

You can also give through our offering here by marking your giving envelope with "Haradas Ministry" under the "Other" section.

As we close, let's pray for the Haradas, as well as for our worship, that we would worship God with all of our lives, including our wallets in generous giving.

Pray.