

Sowing and Reaping
Gal 6:6-10; Prov 3:5-12

As we start a new year let's begin it with the end in mind.

There is an important principle of reality that comes into play – SOWING AND REAPING.

<http://babylonbee.com/news/lifeway-releases-fitbit-tracking-spiritual-health/>

A complete list of spiritual activities the Spiritual Fitbit can track was added to LifeWay's website as part of the product rollout:

- Number of Bible pages turned
- How many hands you shake in church each Sunday
- How long you reflect on your sins before you take Communion
- Your heart rate during Sunday's sermon
- How long your hands are folded in prayer each day
- How vigorously you wave your hands around like a palm tree in a hurricane during the worship set
- Altruistic activities
- Number of tracts passed out each day
- Number of words typed arguing with atheists on the internet

Get ready for 2018 with your spiritual Fit-Bit:

Picking up from last week...

6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches *him*. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Paul is simply reminding us of something we all know to be true, a principle, a law God has built into the very fabric of the universe: what you sow, you reap.

Let's begin with the end in mind.

WHATEVER you sow you will reap. **Whatever** you sow, you **WILL** reap.

So the question for early January 2018 is, "**What are you sowing?**" **YOU WILL REAP IT.**

Martin Luther approached this text with caution because he knew people could question his motives because the principle of "not mocking God and sowing and reaping" comes immediately after the idea of sharing "all good things with those who teach".

It sounds like a great verse for the prosperity gospel TV preacher:

"If you've been taught by this ministry, then watch out – God is not mocked. If you don't sow seed to our support, then you won't reap". Have you heard that from TV preachers? I have

Ouch- no one wants to go there.....yet, you can't separate the verses out of their context.

If sowing and reaping is a biblical principle – which it is- then it will have implications for our time, talent, and treasure. If you've been here the past 4 years, then you know that I preach on giving/stewardship about twice a year.

WHY? Because if you don't hear a biblical perspective on money here, where will you hear it?

An Important principle.

In one of the most significant passages in the Bible about money Jesus said, Be generous with your money, because... "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Why is it important to address this issue? BECAUSE Jesus DOES, and he makes a direction connection with our hearts. It's not money per se that is awkward to talk about – it's the fact that Jesus connects it with the condition of our hearts.

If Jesus had said, "where your exercise level is, there your heart will be also", there would be an awkwardness in talking about exercise. IF Jesus CONNECTS THE DOTS BETWEEN MONEY AND OUR HEARTS, then so must we. **To ignore the topic, from the pulpit or in personal / small group conversations, is spiritual malpractice.**

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also....

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth....

33But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Begin with the end in mind...Do you want to know where your heart is and where it is going?

Examine your relationship with money, your generosity and your giving

In other words, giving is a way to change the loves and engagements of your heart.

**APPLICATION – if you feel disconnected from Highlands, then Give more and your heart will follow.

You don't have to believe me, just believe Jesus.

Jesus is also saying, "One of the ways you can fight against money's power in your heart is to give it away."

§ C.S. Lewis – Screwtape Letters: "Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels that he is finding his place in it, while really it is finding its place in him."

While heeding the warning of Martin Luther about this passage, I want to make a few observations about the 5 Laws of the Harvest and their relationship to stewardship and money. Then we'll close on the principles of Sowing to the Spirit.

2 Cor 9:6-11

6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

9 as it is written,

"HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR,

HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER."

10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

5 BIBLICAL LAWS OF THE HARVEST.....Law 1: The harvest is limited to the planting.

You can only harvest what you plant. If you haven't sown it, God can't multiply it.

The sowing comes first.

There is a temptation to think, "When I get rich, or richer, then I'll start to give."

• The idea is as some say, "If it multiplies, I'll give it away." God says, "Give it away, and it will multiply!" Here's a phrase that may rub us wrong in some way, but believers have found it to be true.

"Generosity is an invitation for God to infuse blessing into your finances."

Giving is a declaration of faith that you need his help and that you're going to follow His principles – first sow, then reap. The biblical principle of Priority giving is an exercise of faith, more than an exercise of financial planning. Priority giving is a faith decision to give to God first – it is the priority.

Law 2: The harvest comes later than the planting.

We're an instant gratification generation.

EX: I'm like that. For example, when I diet, I want to see results immediately. I want to eat one salad one time and be able immediately to look in the mirror the next morning and see the difference. But these results take time. It takes time to reap the harvest of stewardship and generosity.

Sowing, you see, is all about the future. That's why Paul says, v 7 Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap,—because the fact that the harvest comes later makes it an easy principle to forget.

Law 3: The harvest is greater than the planting.

In the harvest, what comes back to you is always greater than what you sowed.

o Plant a wheat seed and it will turn into a wheat stalk that can produce hundreds of wheat seeds.

• Jesus talked about a harvest of 30, 60 and 100 fold!

The magnitude of what you reap is greater than what you sow:

Malachi 3:10 "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." Do you need to Test Him and see?

Law 4: The harvest is proportional to the planting.

Scripture says the blessing God puts in us is proportional to the sacrifice. It's greater, but it's also proportional. • Mal 3:10

Your generosity toward God and others unleashes his generosity toward you. –

• I know some of you are already objecting—don't argue with me, argue with Solomon

• Remember Prov 3:9–10...

9 Honor the LORD from your wealth

And from the first of all your produce;

10 So your barns will be filled with plenty

And your vats will overflow with new wine.

You've probably heard it said that, "You can't out-give God!" Please know that I'm not trying to create some kind of rule for you. I'm just saying, "How much do you want God to bless and multiply you? That will be proportional to what you offer."

• God observes our giving not so much by how much we put in, but by what kind of sacrifice it represents for us.

LUKE 21:1-4 1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. 2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. 3 And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor

widow put in more than all of them; 4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."

Jesus was paying attention to what people gave, and he commented on it. What if Jesus tweeted about our -your and my giving practices? #onlygivingoutoftheirsurplus or #sacrificialgiving #cheerfulgiving...#tithingbutheartisfarfromme

Law 5: We can't do anything about this year's harvest, but we can change next year's.

- You reap today what you sowed yesterday. You can't change that, even if you pray about, even if you ask for forgiveness.

The topic of money is awkward, more so in our culture than in many around the world. That indicates the skewed place money has in our cultural life.

Listen, over the years, study after study show that a sizable % of American Evangelicals give away \$0. Generis consultant – 50% of PCA regulars give \$0.00 The avg "Evangelical" gives about 4%; non-evangelicals give about 2.3%.

Let's bring it much closer to home:

We have a diverse group in terms of age, season of life, 1 or 2 income families, singles, marrieds, retired, etc. We know that some folks give to causes outside of Highlands, so a portion of their giving would not be reflected in our system.

We encourage PERCENTAGE PRIORITY Giving, but we don't review financial giving among the Elders as a whole.

If anything, we may be remiss in our lack of process to connect what Jesus says about money and the heart with our shepherding. We need to work on that. As awkward as it may be in our culture, or it may feel, the Elders can't shepherd effectively if we are totally ignorant of where the sheep are in regard to money. If you don't like that, then take it up with Jesus.

Here are a few external things that we do know, based on our records – WITHOUT knowing how much has been given by specific people:

We averaged 65 regular attending family or single giving units in 2017. YOUR YEAR END STATEMENT IS IN THE LOBBY.

- **Our General Fund giving for 2017 was \$196,175.00.**

- **If the giving of 32 of the 65 giving units if reflects a true tithe (10%), it would indicate that the 32 units are single individuals living at, or below, the poverty level.** Single poverty level is \$12,060 – 10% of that would be \$1,206. We have 32 giving units at or below that giving level, in terms of giving to Highlands – giving may be directed elsewhere.

- **11 officer families gave _34_% of the income for 2017. (16% of giving units gave 34%). This means that our leadership is invested with their Time, Talent, and Treasure –as it should be.**

I WANT TO THANK ALL WHO HAVE BEEN ENGAGED THROUGH GIVING TO HIGHLANDS.

LET'S CONSIDER what our church ministries would be able to do as a result of greater participation in regular faithful giving to the church. We want to be a church where ALL the parts are working together in terms of Time, Talent, and Treasure.

When it comes to money we can even deceive ourselves. But our wallets never lie. Our wallets give an infallible indicator of what we really worship.

Do we trust God enough to step out in faith and sow in obedience to His Word?

For some that may mean becoming a first-time giver

For some that may mean becoming a regular giver

For some that may mean becoming a PERCENT priority giver

For some that may mean increasing that percentage toward a tithe or beyond.

The application today was on our Treasure, but the principles also apply to our TIME AND TALENTS. The real need for 2018 is a heart of repentant faith and that comes as we SOW TO THE SPIRIT.

What does that look like? Six traits: Prov 3 HOW TO SOW TO THE SPIRIT

1. Put your heart's deepest trust in God and his grace. Every day remind yourself of his unconditioned, covenantal love for you. Do not put your hopes in idols or in your own performance. (Prov 3:3-5a)

2. Submit your whole mind to the Scripture. Don't think you know better than God's word. Bring it to bear on every area of life. Become a person under authority. . (Prov 3:5b-6)

3. Be humble and teachable toward others. Be forgiving and understanding when you want to be critical of them; be ready to learn from others when they come to be critical of you. (Prov 3:7-8)

4. Be generous with all your possessions, and passionate about justice. Share your time, talent, and treasure according to Biblical principles.. (Prov 3:9-10)

5. Accept and learn from difficulties and suffering. Through the gospel, recognize them as not punishment, but a way of refining you. (Prov 3:11-12)

6. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thess 5

Is there an area in your life where you need to sow to the Spirit by giving thanks – even, or especially, when you don't FEEL thankful?

Ex: Bob's Brick Oven – Pastor/ staff lunch day. He also does teacher days for Walker and Catoosa counties. I don't know how he does it, but he gives. Most would say, "That's crazy", but he sows generosity and God enables him to harvest financial stability.

The one time the law was reversed was with Jesus. He sowed perfect righteousness, but got Hell, for us, who sow nothing but sin.

GENEROSITY IS SOMEONE WE MEET BEFORE IT IS SOMETHING WE DO.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

It sounds like it doesn't make sense, but we trust not in our own understanding – Jesus said it.

It applies to how we invest our time, talent, and treasure, but He was speaking of his death and the harvest that would come from that.

Come to the Table

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