

SERIES TITLE: "World Series of Stewardship"
SERMON TITLE: "Step Up to the Plate: Be Willing to Share"
SERMON TEXT: 1 Timothy 6:11-19
OCCASION: October 7, 2018, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

Those of you who are familiar with our church know that the fall season includes some weeks when we talk about stewardship and prepare our hearts for making financial pledges to the church for the coming year. In this annual ritual, we use a theme of some kind. Four years ago, we were "Reaching for the Heights." Three years ago, we were "Seeing the Vision." Two years ago, we were "Dwelling in God's House." And last year, we were "Celebrating Our Tenth."

Those were all strong themes that helped us remember our history and plan for our future. But this year, it seemed to me that we needed to do something a little less serious. Life is so full of anxiety already, and talking about money often increases our stress. So, I've been thinking that it would do us some good to laugh and have some fun—like on that Sunday afternoon in August when many of us enjoyed an Ogden Raptors game together. In this month leading up to the World Series, maybe what we need to do is play some baseball.

So, over the next several weeks, we'll be using baseball imagery to help us consider how we might "step up to the plate, get a base hit, increase runners batted in, and hit a home run" in our financial relationship with God. Each Sunday, besides my sermons, we'll have a layperson—like Chris—give a talk about what it means to them to give financially to God through our church. Each of you will also receive a letter and information in the mail. Then, during worship on Sunday, October, 28, we'll "bring home" our completed pledge cards and consecrate them to God.

O.K. So today we begin by stepping up to the plate. Oh, yeah, that reminds me. I have a question to ask you. Where in the Bible is there a reference to baseball? (Gen. 1:1 & John 1:1—"In the beginning/big inning).¹ So, today, we're beginning by stepping up to the plate. In baseball, there's no way to score unless you pick up a bat and walk into the batter's box. To put that in terms of Christian

stewardship, there's no way to score the joy of giving unless we begin by being willing to share.

Throughout the Bible, we see this message over and over again. The goodness of life and the blessings of God come most fully when we're willing to open up our hearts and financial resources. This morning I'd like us to focus our attention on 1 Timothy 6:11-19, where we see three great reasons to step up to the plate and be willing to share.

1—GOD COMMANDS US TO SHARE

The first reason to step up and be willing to share is that God commands us to do so. In 1 Timothy 6:17-18, the Apostle Paul (or someone who had been following in Paul's footsteps) wrote to the young pastor Timothy that he should "command" the people in his congregation "to be generous and ready to share." We who don't like to be ordered around might immediately wonder how a pastor or even God could require generosity or command willingness to share. Isn't that like ordering someone to be loving? How can such a matter of the heart be commanded?

Obviously, generosity and a ready and willing spirit aren't things that can be forced on someone who's 100% dead-set against them. But, in the rest of us, these qualities usually can be persuaded and inspired. We all know of times when someone had to force us to do what was right so that we would eventually learn to appreciate it. Some of us might never have learned to brush our teeth or take a bath if our parents hadn't required it of us. Many of us wouldn't have gained an appreciation for vegetables if we hadn't been ordered to eat them. Many of us might not have ever gone to school or church if someone hadn't commanded us to go. Many of us wouldn't have changed our diet or exercise habits if a scary medical event or set of lab numbers hadn't forced us to reevaluate our ways. Even if, at first, we didn't like the feeling of being coerced, we often have eventually found value in a practice and matured into the desire to continue on our own, voluntarily and freely from our own hearts.

The goal is that we would become ready and willing to share. If we're not quite there yet, then the command from God can be the nudge to get us going and help us step up to the plate.

2—WE WILL STORE UP THE TREASURE OF A GOOD SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

In verse 19, the writer of this letter gives us a second reason to step up to the plate and be willing to share: so we will store up “the treasure of a good foundation for the future.” Even though money is a material thing, financial giving is a spiritual act that lays a spiritual foundation. When we’re willing to let go of some portion of our financial resources, that indicates our willingness to trust in God rather than money.

That’s not to say that material things aren’t important. We all need a house to live in. We all need food to eat and clothes to wear. We need school supplies, medicine to keep us healthy, and even a few toys to play with. God knows we can’t live without material things. But we also have a spiritual side of us which must be nurtured, so that when rough times come, we have a foundation that’s more solid than fleeting material goods. It’s like Jesus said in Matthew 6:20—that we should “store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves don’t break in and steal.”

As 1 Timothy 6:17 indicates, it’s not wise for us “to set [our] hopes on the uncertainty of riches.” Whether we have a lot of riches or hardly any, we never know when something terrible will happen to us and our stuff. Think about the people of Indonesia, where—a little over a week ago—an earthquake and tsunami struck and liquefied the earth, so that you could see it moving like water. That unexpected natural disaster has killed nearly 1800, and left another 70,000 homeless as their houses were washed away or collapsed. Life in this world is fleeting and unpredictable. When an illness steals away our health, when a precious loved one dies, when a natural disaster destroys our home, when divorce divides our family—we need something under us that won’t shake, rattle, or roll. We need a firm spiritual foundation that only God can provide.

That good spiritual foundation is available to us when we put our trust in God. We practice trusting God by letting go of some of our material wealth. In the short term, it may be scary for us to give away what we have and what we think we need, because it makes us feel less certain of our

material well-being. But over a period of practiced generosity, we find that our trust muscles grow strong. After we have given away some of our material security and survived, and even thrived, it will be much easier for us to believe that God is able to take care of us, no matter what. So, let's be willing to share, so we can lay that good and firm spiritual foundation.

3—WE WILL TAKE HOLD OF LIFE

In 1 Timothy 6:19, we read a third encouragement to step up to the plate. If we're willing to share, it will help us "take hold of the life that really is life."

Since we live in a consumer society and are constantly bombarded by advertising about all the great things life has to offer us, we might jump to the conclusion that "the life that really is life" would be gained by spending more of our money on ourselves. Surely a new digital device, a new car, a new wardrobe, a new vacation trip, or a new beauty enhancement might be just the ticket.

But I'm pretty sure that the author of 1 Timothy 6:19 had something else in mind. In verse 12, the young pastor Timothy is told to "take hold of the *eternal* life to which you were called." According to verses 6-10, the way to do that is to be content with the material goods that we have, not allow ourselves to be tempted and trapped by riches, and not allow ourselves to be so in love with money that we wander away from faith. Stated another way, in verses 13-16, we take hold of eternal life by keeping God's commandments and staying focused on our Lord Jesus Christ, "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords." As we keep our eyes on the prize of Christ's immortality, we too will rise up to that eternal life which God richly provides for us. Verse 18 tells us that persons who take hold of this eternal life are "rich in good works." If you think that sounds too laborious, then notice verse 17, which says that God "richly provides us with everything for our *enjoyment*." Contrary to what some people might think, the life of generosity, the life of sharing, the life of storing up treasures in Christian faith and good deeds is a wonderful and richly-rewarded life. So, let's take hold of the life that really is life. Let's step up to the plate and be willing to share.

CONCLUSION

Because of where I lived for 26 years, my Major League Baseball loyalty is to the Colorado Rockies. I'm hoping they'll win today's post-season game against the Wisconsin Brewers and turn the series around.

One of the human interest stories of the Rockies is right fielder Carlos Gonzalez. In 2010, Gonzalez was voted by his peers as the National League's player of the year. No other Rockies player had ever won that honor. "CarGo," as he is called, was selected for that award because of his tremendous contributions in the 2010 season. Gonzalez ranked fourth in home runs, third in runs, second in slugging percentage and runners batted in, and first in hitting—both hits and total bases.²

Becoming a major league player with so much acclaim didn't come easily for Carlos Gonzalez, however. He was born in Venezuela. Because his family didn't have much money, Carlos and his older brother would "snap limbs off trees and carve them into bats. Their baseball was made of rolled-up socks." His older brother "worked odd jobs so he could buy spikes and a glove" for younger Carlos.³

Still playing well for the Rockies today, Carlos Gonzalez obviously became a very talented baseball player. But he never would have gotten to that level of skill without getting into the game with what little he had. And neither will we. To become a skilled giver to God, we don't have to start off giving huge amounts. The very first thing we have to do is step up to the plate and make a commitment. If it helps motivate you, remember that God commands us to share, generosity will help us store up a good spiritual foundation, and this is the way to hold onto the life that really is life. So let's do it. Whether we have a little or lot, it all begins in the same place. Let's step up to the plate; let's be willing to share.

¹Where in the Bible can you find a reference to baseball?

Gen. 1:1—"In the beginning (big inning) God created the heavens and the earth."

John 1:1—"In the beginning (big inning) was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

²<https://www.denverpost.com/2010/10/29/rockies-gonzalez-voted-mlbs-top-player-by-his-peers/#ixzz13r1TIKlz>

³http://www.browsebiography.com/bio-carlos_gonzalez.html