

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – November 17th, 2024 (11:11 am)

STEWARDS OF THE LORD

Psalm 67

**2 Corinthians 9:6–15**

Mark 12:41–44

“Why” we give is every bit as important as “what” we give. And, in case it seems I’m only talking about money, let me clarify that our offerings to God include so much more—our time, talents, energy, and even our creative imagination.

In many ways, giving money can be the simplest part. So, yes, when I speak about a theology of offering, I am talking about money, but I also want us to reflect on everything we have to offer, beyond money. And the question at the heart of it all is simply, *why?*

Why would you choose to contribute a significant portion of your precious time and resources to the church, or to an organization or charity that you care about? When you’re clear about your reason, you have the chance to become what Paul describes as **“a cheerful giver”** (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The offering according to the bible consists of three key points:

1. **All that we have, and all that we are, belong to God.** We have nothing to offer except what God has entrusted to us. Job put it best: **“Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord”** (Job 1:21). The truth is, everything belongs to God—not only our possessions but also our health, our vitality, our days on this earth, and even our ability and motivation to set and accomplish goals. We are not owners, but stewards of what God has given us. Once we grasp this, we can move to the second point:

2. **Our offering to God is a response to God’s prior offering to us**—the countless blessings we’ve received and, most importantly, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins. John says in his first letter, **“We love because He first loved us”** (1 John 4:19). In much the same way, we give because God first gave to us.

A story tells of a father who took his little boy to a baseball game. On the way in, he bought his son a bag of peanuts. Later, he asked if he could have a peanut, and his son

clutched the bag tightly, saying, “No! They’re mine!” The father replied, “Okay, I was just hoping you’d want to share.” The boy thought for a moment, then held out the bag and said, “You can have some, Dad.” The father took a peanut and put his arm around his son, saying, “It’s really not about the peanuts; it’s about us doing things together and sharing what we have.”

Similarly, God gives to us so we can give to others. We are to be conduits of God’s grace and love. As long as we see ourselves as conduits, not containers, the blessings will flow freely. The more we give, the more we’ll find we have to give. We can never out-give God.

Problems arise when we start hoarding, when we view our assets as something we earned, deserve, or need to hold onto. It’s God who not only gives us what we have but also the ability and motivation to earn it. Success requires hard work, perseverance, and sacrifice, but these are all gifts in themselves. If everything were handed to us, we wouldn’t truly appreciate it.

Having put in effort to succeed, we sometimes make the mistake of thinking that the rewards are ours to keep rather than God’s gifts to share with others. Only when we connect our resources to God’s blessings can we freely give to others without resentment or expectation of a return.

**3. The proper attitude for offering our gifts to God is not guilt, fear, or obligation, but humility, gratitude, and joy.** Our gifts to the church should be offered freely and not forced. As the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians when asking for support for the church in Jerusalem, “Each person should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

There is no membership fee for the church of Jesus Christ. We don’t pay dues, are not assessed for expenses, nor taxed in any way. We don’t even take up a collection; we receive an offering. A collection is about raising funds, while an offering is an expression of praise and appreciation for God’s blessings. As one church treasurer once said, “As we approach this important time in the life of our church, may we remember why we give: We give out of love and gratitude to God and out of love for each other.”

**In summary:** *Why* we give—our money, time, talent, and creative energy—is as important as *what* we give. I invite you to make this belief yours as well:

**1. All that we have, and all that we are, belong to God. We have nothing to offer except what God has entrusted to us.**

**2. Our offering to God is a response to His countless blessings to us, and especially to His offering of Jesus Christ for our forgiveness.**

**3. The right attitude for giving to God is humility, gratitude, and joy, not guilt, fear, or obligation.**

Simply put, “We joyfully offer our gifts to God, from whom all blessings flow, grateful to Him who died for us.” When this is our motivation for giving, we’re bound to feel good about it—and even more, we’re sure to be blessed.

Just as with the boy and his father at the baseball game, the same applies to us: It’s not about peanuts; it’s about doing things together and sharing what we have, to the glory of God. Amen.