

The Principle

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[0 : 0 0] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweep from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, I'm excited to come into a new year with you. It's 2024, and I'm just pumped about what God is going to do in and through this church family this coming year.

And so I just want to invite you, if you are a faithful listener to this broadcast, if you are listening to God's word being preached every week, would you just let us know in some way?

You can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com or just call us in the office at 812-663-8488. We would love to just hear how God is using this ministry in your life.

Now, as we start this new series, I want to tell you a story. There was a mom, a dad, and two kids who went to the circus every year, and these kids loved it.

[1 : 0 7] It became a family tradition. So this particular year, they decided they would invite Grandma to come enjoy it with them. As they're heading to the main area to see the big show, there were some different sideshow acts along the way, and they stopped at one where this strong man with huge muscles, you know, kind of like me, probably not, but he was demonstrating his power to the audience.

And towards the end of his act, he took a lemon, and he squeezed all the juice from the lemon between his hand, and then he said that he would give anyone in the audience \$200 if they could squeeze just one more drop out of that same lemon.

So at first, there was silence, until finally Grandma, who was 90 pounds soaking wet, she steps out from her grandkids, confidently picks up the lemon, and immediately squeezes three drops, no problem.

The crowd's laughter at her stature quickly turned to awe. The strong man, his mouth was just wide open. He was amazed because nobody had ever done this to him before.

And trust me, there have been some big dudes who had tried in the past and failed. So true to his word, he paid the woman, and then he asked her in front of everyone, he said, I gotta know, what's the secret to your strength?

[2 : 3 7] I mean, you're probably 90 pounds, what's the secret? And that's when the lady said, honey, that was nothing. Try being the treasurer at my church for 32 years.

Okay, okay, that was bad, I get it, I get it. But there's no way I was going to start a series on financial stewardship without a joke. But hey, welcome to the first Sunday of 2024 here at FCC.

Last year was a great year, seeing God do some wonderful things among this body. The chains of addictions broken, lives surrendered to Jesus, lukewarm Christians reunited with the body of Christ on fire, serving him, this bride of Christ loving our community, our nation, and even to the ends of the earth.

And I'll tell you, the word of God, the word that God has put on my mind as we start this new year, the word that I am focusing on is healthy.

Starting in my personal life, with my relationship with the Lord, with my family, with the church, and even taking care of the temple that God has given me, which I don't always do a great job with, and then spreading even to everything we do here at FCC.

[3 : 51] We want to be healthy from the inside out in everything. We don't want to just put as many bottoms in the seats as possible with chaos ensuing everywhere.

We want to do this God's way. We want to make healthy disciples who in turn, driven by his grace, go and make more healthy disciples.

And that means that each of us need to be healthy in our walk with Jesus, growing every day, passionate about those holy habits that Pastor Mitch talked about last week that helped us to grow.

But I'll tell you, for a lot of Christians, the last area they get healthy is finances. It's like this is kind of the untouchable in the church, where whenever you talk about money, people get real quiet.

Some people even shut down. Pastor, you can talk about me kicking these addictions. You can go on about me doing a better job of getting in the word and prayer. You can even speak about my anger and surrendering that to the Lord.

[4 : 51] I'll even let you hit on lust or pride or envy and how important it is that we crucify those things and have victory in our life. But don't you dare talk about my money.

Don't talk about my possessions. Now, we would never say that out loud, right? But how often does our attitude and truly honoring the Lord and our finances kind of shout this message out?

If our actions were the only things speaking, would it say that I'm healthy when it comes to how I surrender my money and my stuff to the Lord? Is he truly in every financial decision that I make?

See, I got to tell you, this is tough for all of us. And the reason I want us to talk about this topic right off the top in 2024 is because many of you are already thinking about it.

This may be one of your biggest 2024 goals to get healthy financially, to get rid of that intense stress that money can cause on a marriage.

[5 : 51] Just in your own personal life as you worry about it. The stress that money can cause across the board can be insane. But hear me. You can't truly do that until you give God permission to come into this area as well.

And if this is one of your first times maybe listening to us here, we're so glad that you are. We're not a church. I repeat, we are not a church that harps on money all the time.

In fact, my personal philosophy, although I'm going to touch on it from time to time in my messages, I will dedicate a single month about every two years to this.

Because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And we want to stand before our God faithful to preach the whole counsel of his word.

And here's what I love about this series. We started giving out a book last week at church called Take God at His Word. It's by a guy named Dr. Craig Hood.

[6 : 53] But please make sure, if you would like one of those to kind of follow along, you can come by the church and pick one of those up. We'd be glad to give you one. But each week, we ask that you read a short chapter as we go and even work through the discussion questions with your family.

But all of it is straight from the word. And I can promise you, I have no intentions here to guilt trip you, to nag you into giving. Our goal is to humbly come before our God saying, Lord, speak to my heart.

Show me how I can please you in every single area of my life. And that includes my giving. That's not the only area. It includes my giving, how I handle debt, and how I use what you've given me to bless others.

And church, today, I just want to start off by taking a broad look at some biblical principles that we're going to kind of go more detailed into over the course of this month.

But if you have your outline, and don't forget, you can always get that by going to the YouVersion Bible app. Y-O-U version Bible app. It's free.

[8 : 03] You can download that, and you can go ahead, and you can get that. But if you would, you can go to that. You can go to events. Go to FCC Greensburg. And then you can see our outline.

But here's the first principle that we want to start off with. It's called the Who's in Charge Principle. The Who's in Charge Principle.

Because as I've said before, if you get this principle, it'll change everything about how you live your life, and you'll never want to go back. So let me ask you this. How many of you remember that old Shenandoah movie from 1965 that was set back during Civil War days?

Anybody remember that movie? In this movie, you've got a guy named Charlie Anderson, kind of a tough, gruff guy, not real godly. And he bows his head at dinner to say grace.

And this is actually what comes out. He says, Lord, and I want you to listen real clearly to this. Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it. We sowed it. We harvested it. We cooked the harvest.

[9 : 07] It wouldn't be here, and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We work dog bone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you, Lord, just the same for the food that we're about to eat.

Amen. I'm not sure that was a prayer because it wasn't really thanking God for anything. But, you know, I think so many people, including maybe some of us, have this same attitude.

Why would I give my hard-earned money away? Nobody gave me anything. Man, I've worked my tail off for everything I have. And you know what? That may be true.

But what we often don't realize is that this principle, that God's the owner and I'm just the manager, that we have to get this principle. Look at me here at Psalm 24, verse 1.

David, a man of tremendous resources, as the king over Israel, a guy who was filthy rich, would have said this, The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

[10 : 09] And then in Psalm 89, 11, the psalmist declares, The heavens are yours and yours also the earth. You founded the world and all that is in it.

In other words, we've all heard the saying, This is my world, you just get to live here. Actually, God's the only one who could say that. Because he literally spoke into the darkness, into that deep void, and he created light.

He created the land and the sea. Created the birds of the air, the fish and the ocean, every animal that lives on this planet. And not only that, he created man out of dirt.

No wonder we like to play in it so much, right? And then he created woman from the rib of a man. And so the truth is that we are totally dependent on God for everything.

God gives me the strength I need to work dog bone hard and make a paycheck. God is the source of everything. And the cool part is that he entrusts you and me to be his managers on this earth.

[11 : 14] His stewards over everything. See, my house, if you think about it biblically, doesn't belong to me or even to the bank. It's God's.

And he entrusted to me to be used for his glory. My vehicle, it doesn't belong to me. It's his to be used for his glory. Every penny I make belongs to God.

So I'm not sharing, okay, God, I'm going to give you what's mine and I'm going to give you this percentage. No, I'm returning a small portion back to him by what belongs to him anyways to show my faithfulness and my appreciation of his grace in my life.

Now, like I said earlier, King David was a man who understood this who's in charge principle pretty well. Toward the very end of his life, he's realizing that he's not going to be the one to build the temple for the Lord like he wanted.

It was going to be entrusted to his son Solomon. However, that doesn't stop David from coming alongside and giving a ton of his own resources for this project. He even recruits others to give sacrificially.

[12 : 19] And then he prays this prayer before the people. And I'm going to start here in 1 Chronicles 29, verse 10. He says, strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. And here's what I really want you to see. Now look at 1 Chronicles 29, verse 14, and then we'll jump to verse 16.

But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. Now look at verse 16. Lord our God, all this abundance we have provided for building you a temple for your holy name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. See, God is the source. From his powerful and loving arms comes everything we have, everything we are. We are simply called to be faithful managers of what he gives us. That's the who's in charge principle. And I'm telling you, when you truly get this, not just in your brain, but when it overflows into your heart and changes you, man, your life will never be the same, and you would never go back to the way it used to be. Now, let's talk about this second principle, the cheerful giver principle. You know, being a great steward is more about the heart than it is about your wallet. Plain and simple. And in 2 Corinthians 9, 7, the Apostle Paul says, each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Now, I may get in trouble with our financial people here, but if we come with this attitude of, here God, let's just say that, let's just do this picture in your head right now, okay? The offering plates are being passed, and you're sitting there, and it comes by you, and you got this money, and you really don't want to give it. You're like, here God, just take it.

I guess this is what I'm supposed to do. Just take it. You throw it in there. To be honest with you, at that point, God doesn't want it. That doesn't glorify him whatsoever. If that's the attitude, then listen, just keep it. See, God looks at the heart. He wants us to see our giving, and he wants to see that flow from a heart of thankfulness and worship. You know, when I was in college, I joined a church, and it wasn't long until this one key leader started really investing in me, encouraging me. At first, he and his wife would do little things like take me out to eat after church, which was awesome because I was a poor college kid, and then they started coming to my basketball games and pouring into my life. He started praying with me, praying for me, still does to this day, but one thing I always noticed about this guy was that he gave cheerfully to the Lord.

Not only did he go above and beyond his tithe to his church, but he would just randomly do things like give money to those that he knew needed it. And I remember right before I left school for the last time after graduation, he took me out for the day, showed me some sites along the Mississippi River.

I'd never seen them before, kind of showed me where the flood happened years ago, and he bought me lunch at this nice place. And then when he dropped me off, he gave me a Billy Graham book, and tucked inside of it, was a hundred dollar bill. And I'll never forget his example. What a joy to be such a cheerful giver, because that's exactly what he was, and to be a part of what God is doing in our community and in the world. And then the third principle I want you to see is called the big shovel principle. Big shovel principle. You know, many years ago, a man named Captain Levy, who was a believer from Philadelphia, he was asked how he could give so much to the Lord and still possess such great wealth. And I love his response. He said, Oh, as I shovel it out, he shovels it back in, and the Lord has a bigger shovel.

[17 : 12] Now, in case I just scared you with that comment, let me stop right here and say that there are some who are skeptical about this, and for good reason. Too many people have been burnt by a small percentage of these televangelists who come on TV, beg and guilt you into giving a hundred dollars or a thousand dollars to the Lord's work so that one more soul can come to know Jesus. At least that's what they say.

They promise you that God will shower you back tenfold or a hundredfold, and the next thing you know, they're hopping on their private jet, headed for one of their four mansions on the beach.

That is absolutely wrong. And the reason why is because of the motives that are behind it. And this is also why so many people have been turned off from church, especially when we preach on giving.

See, we don't give to get. That is the wrong motives, and you will never trick God with your motives. But you can say it this way. We give to get to give back to the kingdom of God. When our hearts are pure there, God is going to entrust resources to us that we can bless others and bless the kingdom with. But one thing I've noticed is oftentimes as conservative Bible-believing Christians, we have the tendency, because of the crazy things, the health and wealth gospel, other things that we've heard taught, we have the tendency to run to the opposite extreme that is also unhealthy, where we don't want to talk about how the Lord blesses us in return, because we're afraid of being labeled health and wealth. But what it comes down to is it's all about the heart. The reality is that God dares us. In the last book of the Old Testament, a book called Malachi, He dares us to honor Him in our tithes and our offerings. He says, test me. And if you are faithful to me, I'll throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. And that can come financially, or maybe even in some other ways, whatever God decides to do. But that is the promise. And Jesus gives us another one in Luke 6 38. He says, give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. And I can tell you from experience that Bethany and I have seen this to be true time and time again in our life, even right now in our life with some stuff that we're dealing with. When we honor God right off the top before anything else, when we even go the extra mile, he blesses that and he takes care of us just fine. You know, one example of this going back a few years was the car that I had when my wife and I first met. She affectionately nicknamed it the poop tea, okay?

It was a 97 black Cavalier. In my opinion, one of the best looking Cavaliers that was ever made. But believe it or not, at one time, that was a really nice car. I got it with 80,000 miles roughly on it in 2001. And I drove it through college for another seven years after that until the motor finally gave out in 2013. So I had it from 01 to 2013. And it had 220,000 miles when that motor finally gave. It made a ton of noises. By the end, it did not look good at all. But that car was amazing.

[20 : 49] Rarely had any issues with it. And when I did, they were extremely minor. And I really feel like God blessed that vehicle because we chose as hard as it can be when life happens, we still chose to trust him and honor him first in our giving. Now, 2 Corinthians 9, 6 puts it like this. Remember this.

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows generously will also reap generously. God wants to bless us in our giving. And I don't know how he will choose to do that, whether he blesses you financially or gets you that raise at work or your business suddenly takes off. I don't know. But God says, test me. He says, come on, man, put me to the test. Now, this is the only area where he says that, okay? So that's why this is so important. But he says, I double dog dare you to take me at my word. And you watch how I'll pour out so much blessing that you won't have room enough to store it. That's called the big shovel principle. And here's the last one I want to talk about today, the river principle. See, we were never intended by God to be a reservoir by which we just store up everything so we can accomplish our American dream and prove to all of our friends how important we are, keep up with the Joneses, all that stuff. We are not as Christians intended to go down that route.

In fact, we're intended to go against the grain. We're intended to be a river. Whereas God blesses us in every area of our life, we're allowing it to flow freely from us back to him to build his kingdom.

Bo Dunford put it this way. He said, we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. And in Matthew chapter 28, we have what's called the great commission. Well, Jesus, he tells us our purpose as his followers, as the church of Jesus Christ. Here's what it says. Then Jesus came to them and he said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. One major command there, go, go and make disciples. We have the privilege of using every resource God blesses us with to build his kingdom, to store up treasures in heaven. So let me close with this story. A news reporter was once visiting the home of a wealthy Texas oil man. After dinner, the wealthy Texan took the man up to the roof of his house and he showed him these huge fields of oil derricks. And he said, listen, that's all mine. I came to this country 25 years ago penniless.

And now I own everything as far as your eye can see in that direction. And then he turned the opposite direction and he pointed to the waving grain fields. And he said, that's all mine too. I own everything as far as you can see in that direction. And then he pointed to the huge herds of cattle in the east and a great woods that he had on the west. And he said, it's all mine. I worked hard and I saved. And today I own everything as far as you can see in every direction. He then paused for the expected praise, but to his surprise, it didn't come. See, this news reporter was a Christian and he had a little different perspective on material things. And so he laid his hand on the rich man's shoulder and he pointed up toward heaven and he asked him, my friend, how much do you own in that direction?

[24 : 48] See, that's what this series, Take God at His Word, is all about. Experiencing the true blessing it is to be part of the greatest mission the world has ever known. And you can experience that when you truly do take God at His Word. Because all that other stuff is going to leave me and you wanting for more.

But there's nothing, listen to me here, there's nothing like walking with the Lord and seeing His power and His blessings over your life as you put Him first in everything.

So as I am preaching this message here at FCC on January the 7th, 2024, my hope and prayer for you this year is that as you make your New Year's resolutions, that one of them will be that I'm going to get healthy financially, but not like the world. I'm going to get healthy financially where I put God first and I know then that He will always take care of me. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these words of life that you have spoken to us today. Thank you for just your promises that you give and how you do take care of us and how you can even bless us according to your perfect will. And yet, Father, you call us, no matter whether we're rich or poor or somewhere in the middle, you call us to be faithful, to give back to you, to show, that our hearts are not consumed by the things of this world. And so, Father, I pray as we go throughout this month-long series that you will deal with these hearts and that you will help us to truly trust you, not just with our money, but with every single part of our lives as we truly make you the Lord of our lives. We love you, Jesus. Thank you for a new year, and we pray for your richest blessings over every person listening. We pray this in the perfect name of Jesus Christ.

God's people said amen and amen. Hey, just want to give you a quick invitation. If you have some questions about God, which we all do, but if you'd like to have us kind of come alongside you and help you with those, or maybe you want to talk about giving your life to the Lord, I'd love to have that biblical conversation with you. So, please reach out. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here at First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. Always check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or the FCC Greensburg Facebook page. But here's a couple ways you can reach out to us. You can email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com or you can call the church office Monday through Thursday, 8 to 430, and that is 812-663-8488. 812-663-8488. Hey, God bless you. I hope you have a great week.

[27 : 50] Thank you.