



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# **A Sermon on the Amount**

Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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*2 Corinthians 9:6-15*  
*Luke 8:1-8*

No, this is not a misprint. It's not about the "Sermon on the Mount" where Jesus talked about 'blessed are the meek, and those who mourn...you are the salt of the earth...don't be anxious about tomorrow.'

No, this is a sermon on the amount!

So, let's deal with that right from the beginning; let me give you some 'amounts', some numbers about what we are doing.

Our Confirmation Class will have nearly 20 young people in it this year. Our youth groups, Veritas and Jam, have nearly 100 young people on Wednesday nights plus the 100 or so children and adults who are eating dinner in the Fellowship Hall on Wednesdays.

We serve over 400 children through our Nursery School, Child Development Center, and Children's Day In programs every weekday. Close to 500 people use the WROC, our recreation and outreach ministry, each week.

When you add it all up, depending on the season of the year, somewhere between 3,000 and 3,500 people come through the doors of this church every week, who are touched in one way or another by Westminster Presbyterian Church.

And there's no way to figure the amount of people helped by what goes out these doors: SHIM, Homewood, World Vision, Produce to People, the Blood Drive, India, Malawi, throughout the world by our support of Presbyterian missions...an untold

number of people outside the doors of Westminster Presbyterian Church!

I say we don't know. Talking last week with Pastors Pierre and Evens of La Croix Mission in Haiti, they told me that there are a little over 4,000 children in all their schools to which we provide some financial support.

Now this title is not original with me. Most people think it was first used by the late Ernest Campbell, the great preacher at Riverside Church in New York City back in the early seventies.

But I hope it catches your attention in this season of stewardship because we do tend to focus on the amount. We want vital programs, we want to make a difference, we want to meet the needs of families and friends and those in need through the ministries and mission of this great church.

After several months of planning, our commissions have said this is what we think it will cost for us to fulfill our church's mission in 2020; the amount of our preliminary budget is \$2,259,500.

There are decreases in some areas compared to 2019, and there are some increases. A letter will be sent at the end of the month that includes the budgets. The largest increase is to our Outreach and Mission, to restore it to its traditional level.

That is the amount we're asking for, and if our giving doesn't reach that amount, we will adjust accordingly. But if you're expecting me to give you an amount that you need to give to make it all happen, I would love to do that; but I can't.

I think of the teenager going to his father on Friday afternoon, “Dad, could you give me \$50 for the weekend?” And Dad responds, “\$40? Why do you need \$30? Here’s \$20.”

I can’t tell you the exact amount to give; that’s your choice. But what I know from what the Bible teaches, I can tell you that it should have the word generous in front of it!

Look back at our Gospel lesson. We are very familiar with Jesus’ parable of the sower, but first, I want to call your attention to the passage before that story in Luke’s gospel.

Jesus is going about the countryside doing what Jesus does, and Luke gives us a list of the people with him. Of course, there are the disciples, but then he calls out by name these women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Pilate’s chief of staff, Susanna. But what caught me was that last line: *“They provided for Jesus’s ministry out of their resources.”*

Luke actually names names for the stewardship list! I’m not suggesting it, but what if we were to be biblical like that for our stewardship giving?

But I think it’s important to note this list, because after naming those who provided the resources for Jesus’ ministry, Luke has this story of Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seeds.

What I think Luke is doing is saying here’s how Jesus ministry got funded, and Luke wants his gospel listeners to think about, to pray about, to make their commitment to provide the resources for the seeds to be planted to grow the church that is hearing this gospel story from Luke.

Paul uses this imagery from Jesus' story, to sow the seeds, to give from your resources so Jesus can go about doing what Jesus is supposed to do.

He is telling the Christians in Corinth: You have a choice; you make up your mind as to the amount you give to support the mission of the church.

First of all, the offering we give is a matter of choice. Paul tells us that God is seeking a willing response when the heart, our passion, and the head, our intelligence, catch the power of providing for God's glory and goodness.

The result of it all, as Paul describes it, should bring great joy to the one who gives. I'm sure you've always heard that you should give until it hurts. But that's not biblical; the biblical understanding of the offering is that you make a choice to give until it feels good.

Second, our choice about giving is a matter of character. Paul talks of those with a generous heart. Jesus said that where your heart is, there your treasure will be.

I remember a teenage boy, it was early February, and he was very despondent; I asked him what the problem was. He said he had just broken up with his girlfriend, and in a very heartbroken voice, "I gave her the best, (he counts on his fingers (Sept. – Jan.) five months of my life." Come to find out, he had given her a very nice bottle of perfume for Christmas, and had just bought a heart shaped locket he was going to give her for Valentine's.

I suspect he was more upset about the money spent than the girlfriend lost, because the Sunday after Valentine's, he was

sitting with another girl who happened to be wearing a pretty heart-shaped locket.

Heart and treasure are always connected, and when we are confronted with a choice about what we give, there are basically three heart conditions that lead us to choosing an amount.

There is the miserly heart...very utilitarian, very self-focused. The miserly heart looks at giving to the church in terms of its tax benefit. Recent studies show there has been nearly a 2% decrease in charitable giving after the new tax plan went into effect.

This miserly heart condition looks to its own desires and neglects the needs of others, to spend less on everything except what is important to fulfill its own particular personal point-of-view.

It forgets that we are in this together, that there is a spiritual dimension that inspires and encourages, that the spire of this church is a visible reminder of who we are, whose we are; and that fellowship is crucial for the work of the kingdom. In your character and mine, there should be a sense of what is beautiful and good for everyone that overcomes the miserly heart.

And we struggle with what I call the condition of the market heart...So much of our living is judged by the market heart that measures the amount on the bottom line. The market heart looks at home life and focuses more on the cost of living than the purpose of living. Jesus warned us about it: *What shall it profit you if you gain the world and lose your soul?*

Some look at the church with a market heart that believes the church has a product to sell and thinks only about the profit,



P-R-O-F-I-T, and neglects the mission of the church that is for prophet, P-R-O-P-H-E-T, as my colleague Louise Rogers has said, "...people...giving to further the good works of God's kingdom through the church."

In the church, there is the reality of the miserly heart and the market heart, but thank God, there is also, (and I had to go to my thesaurus for this third 'm'), there is also the munificent heart.

Those with 'generous hearts'...munificence, according to the dictionary means "liberal in giving, lavish, great liberality of generosity", exactly the people Paul is talking about; the kind of people who reflect the mind of God; the people of the generous heart are people like you and me who know we belong to a munificent God.

Our generosity is shaped by the generosity of God who has given us the gift of life, the realities of hope, the love of family, the care of friends. There is a spiritual math involved here, and it uses real numbers of our real lives with our real resources.

I knew a young man, a very successful businessman who had a nearly fatal heart attack.

One day after his recovery he came by my office. He pulled out his checkbook to make a contribution to our special missions' fund.

I told him I didn't want to see it - what he was giving. He said, "I'm not filling out the amount; I'll do that when I give it to the business manager. I just want to show you what I've learned.

See that line down there where it says 'for' - every time now that I write a check to the church, I write down on that line what I need to always remember, and then he wrote out, "Thank God."

He had learned something that we all need to learn. The amount we give to God comes after we remember to thank God, after we add up the amount of our commitment and the amount of our joy to give 100% of ourselves; that's the spiritual math that will give you an amount.

It is because of the generosity of God that this church has done all the great things it has accomplished, is doing great things now, and will be doing great things in the future.

I come to the end of this sermon by asking you to write your own sermon on the amount with God alone as your congregation. Just as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount spoke of the blessings, what blessing does God receive from your Sermon on the Amount?

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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