**“Marginalia”**

One of my favorite programs on TV is Jeopardy. If we’re home in the evening, it comes on at 6:30, we almost always watch it. What I like about it is that there are 61 clues and answers in each game, unlike most others that use only five or six in a half hour.

We’re pretty good players. I doubt that I could do as well under the pressure of the camera and live studio audience, but from my recliner I’m killer – as long as I don’t get a lot of Shakespeare clues. And I’m a good guesser.

We try to guess what the clue will be about for Final Jeopardy as soon as Alex announces the category. We’ve guessed that right a few times.

The writers are quite clever in developing categories, often using humor and wit. Once you understand the category it becomes easier to guess on the other clues.

Two particular categories that are difficult to guess are Potpourri and Miscellaneous. The clues in these are just leftovers from games in which they ran out of time and didn’t finish a category.

When Ben and I prepare sermons, we like to work in series. We study a topic or text, gather ideas, and determine what we plan to teach. Then we organize the ideas into individual sermons. It’s not uncommon that we will have “leftovers”, ideas that either don’t fit any of the planned sermons.

I have never entitled a sermon Potpourri or Miscellaneous but today’s could be, so I entitled it “Marginalia”.

This is a miscellaneous collection of Biblical principles and practical suggestions that just didn’t fit the other sermons. We’ll start with the Biblical principles.

I’ll share four, three have already been stated, but differently, one is new in this sermon.

1. God owns everything and trusts us with some of it.

In Psalm 50 God speaks about our offerings saying, *I don’t need*

*anything from you. I don’t need the bull or lamb or goat you bring…*“*for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine.*” Psalm 50:10f

Everything we own is on loan from God. Edwin Hughes, preached about this apparently offending a rich man in his church. The man took Hughes to lunch the next day and then for a tour of his extensive property. “*Now*”, he asked, “*are you telling me all of this does not belong to me?*” Hughes wisely answered, “*Ask me that 100 years from now*.”

That man didn’t own anything. He was merely managing a portion on loan from God.

Jesus told a story about a man who was managing the possessions of a rich man. Someone accused him of mismanaging so the rich man ordered him to give an account.

Knowing he was going to get the “*You’re fired!*” he took action. One guy owed 800 gallons of olive oil. He told him to pay half and call it even. He did the same for a guy who owed 1000 bushels of grain.

Jesus said the manager’s purpose was to make friends who would help him out after lost his job. In explaining the moral of the story Jesus said, *The master commended the*

*dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.*

Then Jesus concluded, *Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.* Luke 16:8, 10

God entrusts His possessions to us. Those who prove faithful with what He already has loaned He rewards with more, but not so that we can bask in our riches. It has always been God’s plan to support His mission through His people. Whether it was…

* famine relief in Romans 15,
* care for widows in 1 Timothy 5,
* building a worship facility in Exodus 25,
* or supporting the leadership of God’s people in Deuteronomy 18 and Philippians 4.

God’s plan is that His people would use the blessings He gives to support His concerns.

It’s not that God needs our money. It’s His money. This is how He chose to pay for His mission: He gives to each of us according to what He knows we can handle, letting us give faithfully – or not.

1. Giving to God’s work is a doorway to blessings.

We’ve said this several times already. God wants to pour blessings on us, more than we can handle, enough to meet all of our needs. He wants to meet our need, not our greed.

I know it seems like God has given a lot to some people who aren’t very generous with it. God knows what each of us is capable of. If He gives someone a lot it’s because He knows that man is capable of managing it well.

Understand, and this is important, each man will be held accountable according to what God has gifted him with. In another application of the story in Luke 16 Jesus asked, *If you*

*have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?* Luke 16:11f

The man who is selfish with his blessings is so because he doesn’t believe in eternal consequences. He chooses to sacrifice eternity for riches in the present. He amasses wealth for today, but what good will that do him after his 70 or 80 years on Earth?

We keep that doorway to blessings open by giving unselfishly. As one very rich man said when asked how he could afford to give so much, *I shovel it out and God shovels it in. God has a bigger shovel than I do*.

1. Giving is an easy way to check our obedience.

Giving is strictly a voluntary action. So is all obedience. Obedience isn’t a matter of earning God’s favor. We’ve already got His favor. Obedience is a love response. By choosing to obey we demonstrate our love for and trust in God. Not obeying is a sign of disrespect.

God has in fact commanded His people to give a tithe. He can each measure our level of obedience by what we give or don’t give.

1. When God produces in you a desire to give, He will also give you the blessings to match.

God will never ask or move you to give more than you can afford. Every man can afford to give a tithe. I remember reading of a missionary who answered a knock at his door in the very poor village he served. There stood a little boy holding a fish.

“*What’s this?*” he asked. “*This is my tithe”*, the boy said with a smile.

* “*You told us we should give a tithe of our wealth*.”
* “*Where are your other nine fish?*” the missionary asked.
* Turning to leave the boy said, “*They’re still in the river. I’m going to catch them now*.”

Whatever God has given you, you have enough to tithe. If God puts a burden on your heart to give, He has already blessed you with enough to give. God who owns everything and loans to us…*will also supply and increase your wealth…You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.* 2 Corinthians 9:10f

Now let’s look at some practical ideas that can help you be a faithful generous obedient giver.

I don’t know who originated this but I love it. There are three kinds of givers:

**First** there are flint givers. Flint givers need a spark to motivate giving. They respond to special pleas for funds or they’re moved by some particular event, like giving to hurricane relief or a “Go Fund Me” for the family of a fallen hero.

It’s not wrong to be a flint giver but it tends to be limited, inconsistent, and undependable.

**Second** there are sponge givers. Sponge givers only give when they’ve been squeezed. Someone “guilted” them into donating to a worthy cause, or they give just so that the asker will leave them alone. Their hearts aren’t in it, but they will give under pressure.

**Third** are honeycomb givers. Honeycomb givers ooze gifts. No one has to spark them or squeeze them. Their hearts are set to be generous givers. It’s their character. They recognize that God has blessed them to be able to help His mission. Honeycomb givers don’t mind giving because they know that God will continue to provide for them and they’ll be able to give even more.

Of the three only the honeycomb givers reflect the image of God. There is no selfish motive or hidden agenda. They share their blessings because that’s what God made them to do.

For those who are not already faithful generous obedient tithers, here are some suggestions that will help you:

1. Give this very Sunday. Take a bold step and act on what we’ve been talking about for the past three weeks.

Understand, Satan doesn’t want you to give. He doesn’t want you to enjoy the blessings God has prepared for you.

He schemes how to keep you from obeying God. He plans how to cause you to put giving off for another day. There’s nothing he won’t do to keep you from trusting God. Don’t let him win.

1. Give regularly.

A clear statement about giving at church is 1 Corinthians 16:1f, *About the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.*

On the first day of every week. The key to this isn’t giving every week. It’s giving regularly. Make it your habit. I get paid every two weeks and every two weeks we write a check.

One way Satan tries to keep you from obeying God is to make you forget until after you’ve spent your money, then you can’t afford to give. The best ways to defeat him is to make giving a regular event.

Notice how the Apostle wrote, *each one of you*. Many parents teach their children by giving them a certain amount to put in the offering. It may be just money from Mom and Dad, or maybe it’s a portion of their allowance. Make it a regular activity. If they learn it when they’re young it’s likely they’ll continue into adulthood.

1. Give according to your blessings.

Paul wrote, *each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.* That’s consistent with tithing. We saw last week that 10% is a legitimate Biblical standard. It’s a standard to start with, but it’s not a limit.

I realize the New Testament doesn’t say Christians have to give a tithe, but the Old Testament does and*, all Scripture is inspired by*

*God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:16f

The Old Testament equips us to obey God’s will, including and maybe especially in this area of tithing.

1. Give to God first.

Do the math, determine what your tithe is and put that aside for the offering before you spend or pay bills. If you turn that around you’ll never tithe. Satan will make sure you never have enough.

Like that little boy with his fish, your tithe should be what Proverbs 3 calls “first-fruits”. As soon as you get paid, set your tithe aside – and don’t touch it for any other reason.

1. Tithe to your church.

When God established the tithe it was specifically to support the leadership of His people, equivalent to the church today. All of the ministry portion of the national government was paid from the tithes.

Our church depends on the generosity of our people. We don’t seek money from people outside of ACC or from government sources. Our current budget requires about $70 per family per week. If we were all tithers that would only require annual income of about $37,000 per family.

A blessing you can expect if you tithe to your church, you’ll fall in love with your church. Jesus said, *where your treasure is, there your will heart be also*. Matthew 6:21 Your heart will always follow your treasure. That’s universal and absolute.

When you give to your church you’ll care about your church, the other church members, the workings of the church, the building, the future, and the leaders. You’ll simply0 love your church.

You’ll still have plenty of money to support private missions and ministries. You’ll be able to…*excel in this grace of giving*. 2 Corinthians 8:7

1. Give to special purposes.

Let your tithe to your church be your general offering, and then support other important issues. That’s what God did when He wanted Israel to build their first worship center, the Tabernacle. *Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.* Exodus 25:2

Go back and read the story in Exodus and you’ll see that the people responded to the point that Moses was forced to tell them to stop. That would be a nice problem to have.

1. Give in different ways.
* Extra cash
* Extra time in commitments previously made (building fund)
* Give assets (land, stocks, insurance policies)
* Wills or estates
* Reduce living expenses
* Post-pone “want based” spending
* Redirect completed obligations (car payment, house payment)

Be creative. God will honor your gifts.

Very quickly, if you’re just getting started with Christian giving, especially tithing take these four steps:

Step One, Pray about it. Allow God to guide you.

Step Two. Create a budget for yourself that supports tithing.

Step Three, be faithful. Don’t give up.

Step Four, be patient. You may not see instant results. God may want to see if you’ll keep it up or are you playing games with giving.

Dr. Kregg Hood is the author of several great books about Christian giving from which I’ve learned a lot. Two of them are, Take God at His Word and Rich toward God.

In Take God at His Word he tells of a mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. “*Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself,*” she told the girl.

When they were leaving church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. “*Well*,” said the little girl, “*I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter… so I did*.”

Mother may not have agreed with her daughter’s reasoning, but at the heart of the matter is this fact, the daughter gave in the way she believed.

We all give according to what we believe. Whether we have a little or a lot; whether we give a little or a lot, we all give according to what we believe. God knows it, and I’m pretty sure we know it as well.

Think about this. I know I’ve told this before but I absolutely love it. Peter Marshall was the preacher at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Later he became Chaplain to the United States Senate. Once after preaching about tithing a member of his congregation came with a bit of a complaint.

“*Pastor*”, he said, “*I heard everything you said about tithing, and I agree with you, however, I want you to realize, I make a lot of money. For me to tithe would be several hundred thousand dollars*.”

Marshall, without hesitation offered to pray with him about his dilemma. He prayed, “*Lord you know this servant of yours wants to obey you. He has been very successful and for him to give a tithe would be very costly. Would you please reduce his income so he can afford to obey you in tithing?*”

Would you pray with me right now that God would make your income equal your current giving times 10?