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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Re-Member: Why Give?* Various Texts

If you are visiting with us this morning, you happen to arrive in the last week of an historic season in the life of our church. Next Sunday at 10:00am we will be received into the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. For a visitor, all this talk of denomination and membership may not make too much sense to you. But if you listen in on it, you will realize that this isn't mostly a conversation about denominations but about the things that matter most to us as a church family. Even if you are a guest, I hope you'll join us next week! It will be a packed house, so I'd urge all of you to come early, park off-site, use extra deodorant, and be ready to be friendly with your pew mates!

About 1300 people have now "Re-Membered" and are excited about our future in a new denominational home. But some of us have not yet. I've had several wonderful conversations with dear Chapel Hill folks who are nervous because they don't want us to change. I assure them that Chapel Hill will continue to be the church they fell in love with. One of the core values of the EPC is the autonomy of the local congregation. But one man replied, "If we are going to be the same, why was everyone required to "Re-Member?" Why didn't the EPC just allow us to transfer our membership rolls?" The answer is: they would have allowed that. The EPC accepts any members the Session presents. It was **our session** who decided this was an opportunity for every person, individually, to reaffirm what membership means. Not to the EPC, not to a denomination, but to a local church family... Chapel Hill.

The Session felt that automatically transferring every member into the EPC would be manipulative; that every person should have the right to make their own decision about this important matter. That is why we are Re-Membering. Not because the EPC requires it, but because your Session thought it was the honorable thing to do. And as for the expectations of membership that we've been talking about—except for the affirmation of Jesus as Lord and Savior—all the rest of the expectations are Chapel Hill expectations, not EPC. I need to be clear about that. Your Session believes that membership—the process and the commitment of membership—is an opportunity for growth in Christian discipleship. We expect our members to become better disciples of Jesus by becoming part of a LifeGroup, a small accountability group. We expect our members to become better disciples of Jesus by making Sunday morning worship a priority in their lives. We expect our members to become better disciples of Jesus by serving Him somewhere. And finally, this morning, here is our fourth and last discipleship expectation of our members: "I will give regularly to my church a prayerfully determined percentage

of my income." We expect our members to grow as disciples of Jesus by giving to their church.

And right here, the pucker factor amps up! Here some of you will feel like I've moved from preachin' to meddlin'. I can hear it already: "You can't tell me how I spend my money." You're right, I can't. So before any of you get your backs up and your necks stiff, I'd like to approach this topic differently. Instead of telling you why you should give, I'd like to share why we give. Cyndi and I have always tithed to our church. That means we give at least the first ten percent of what we make back to Chapel Hill. Actually, it is more. Beyond that we also support other charities, but at least a tithe is deducted right from my paycheck before we even see it because we consider our tithe to our church as the priority in our charitable giving.

But why? Why do we give to our church? Cyndi and I came up with 14 reasons and then stopped. We don't have time for fourteen reasons. So I'll share eight bullet points with you. And maybe—if giving is a struggle for you, if money sermons normally make you mad—maybe listening to our heart on this will be helpful for you.

Cyndi and I give because:

**God gave.** Our God is a giving God. The most famous verse in the Bible reminds us of that: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son." John 3.16. Ephesians 1:8 tells us that God has "lavished us" with the riches of his grace. Elsewhere Paul talks about God's "indescribable gift" to us. II Cor. 9.15. The gift of creation, the gift of life, the gift of relationships, the gift of love and peace and joy and purpose—the incredible gift of salvation through the death of his one and only Son—everywhere we look we are reminded that our Heavenly Father spoils us with his gifts of kindness. I learned to give by watching my earthly father give. I also learn to give when I watch how my heavenly father gives.

**We are grateful.** Paul once asked the Corinthians this biting question: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" I Cor. 4.7. I remember a wealthy woman pulling me aside and saying, "I resent it when you say that everything I have is a gift from God. My late husband and I worked hard for our money. God didn't give us anything."

Wow! Don't you find that a little scary? Of course many of us work hard, but the very fact that we were born here instead of Somalia, that we have education, resources, security, health... were you responsible for any of that? Cyndi and I believe that everything we have comes as an undeserved gift from God. We give because we are grateful for His kindness.

**We want to be obedient.** The Bible is clear that God expects His children to be givers. Malachi 3.8 says that when we don't tithe, we rob God! Strong language! The New Testament example was even more extreme. People often sold everything they had and gave it to the church (Acts 2.44), they even did so publically. Acts

4.32-35. Obedience isn't the noblest reason to give... especially if you do so resentfully. Paul says that God loves a "cheerful giver." II Cor 9.7. But if we claim to be followers of Jesus—yet stubbornly refuse to obey Him with our money—is Jesus really Lord of our life? We don't think so.

**We want to control our appetites.** Paul told the Philippians that he had "learned to be content" with whatever he had. Phil 4.12. And he was writing from prison! We have watched too many people who think that happiness only comes when they acquire the next, newest and neatest thing. It's a lie. We believe that real contentment comes when you can say, "I don't need another darned thing." Cyndi and I don't need another darned thing. We already have more than we need. And when we give away an increasing chunk of our money instead of finding ways to spend it on cool new things for ourselves, it is our way of saying, "Enough. We have enough. We are content."

**We want to be more generous.** Cyndi is a naturally generous person. My father and mother are generous people. I am not as naturally generous; it doesn't come as easily for me. And yet, I admire generosity and I find it scattered throughout the Bible. In II Corinthians 9, Paul talks about an offering he is receiving for the Jerusalem church. And in only ten verses, he uses the word "generous" seven times. Generosity is a muscle; the only way to strengthen it is to use it. And I want to be a more generous person, so we give away more and more of what we make.

**We want our children to be generous.** I learned to tithe because my father taught me to tithe. Everyone knows Proverbs 22:6: "Train up your child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." But did you know that the very next verse is, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." One of the ways I train up my child is to mentor them in God's principles about saving and giving and spending. My children are surrounded by kids that can have just about anything they want... within a culture that says it is their right to have it all. I don't want my children worshipping that idol. I want them to master their money not be mastered by it. And it is my job to teach them. Because I believe greed produces pinched, selfish and awful people, I want my children to learn to be generous... from me.

**Because we believe in the mission and ministry of our church.** Jesus taught, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matt 6.21. Our hearts are right here in this church family. We joyfully give our treasure to this church because we believe in it. Even if I weren't the pastor of this church, Chapel Hill is the kind of church we would want to be a part of. We love the heart of this congregation: its devotion to its community, its passion for evangelism and justice, its focus on kids and families. You have helped us raise our children to love the Lord, and we are grateful. We believe in who you are and what God has called you to do... and we want to invest in that. We give because we believe that you are transforming the world for the sake of Christ.

And, by the way, we also give because we wouldn't dream of expecting someone else to pick up the tab for the things that benefit us. We would never go to a restaurant with friends, enjoy a great dinner and then get up and walk out, just expecting them to pay for our meal. We would be embarrassed to use others in that way and take advantage of their generosity. For us, it is just as unthinkable to enjoy the benefits of this congregation: Sunday worship, classes, kids' activities and all the rest—unthinkable for us to consume these things and then to expect you and you and you to pick up our tab. It would make us feel like users. And nobody likes a tightwad... not in a restaurant... and not in a church.

There's one more reason we give. Perhaps it is a more selfish. But we also give because...

**We want to enjoy the blessing of God.** Malachi 3.10 invites us to put God to the test. To try tithing and see if God won't open the windows of heaven and pour down blessing upon us. Jesus said, "Give and it will be given back to you. Pressed down, shaken together, running over." Luke 6.38. Because I know it is easy for me to be selfish, I want to fight the temptation to make my return blessing the highest reason that I give... kind of like a heavenly Ponzi scheme. But the fact is, again and again the Bible promises that if we are faithful in our giving to God, He will reward that faithfulness by pouring out blessing upon us... in embarrassing proportions. This isn't a prosperity gospel message. Life is complicated, but I can testify that as we have tried to be faithful in our giving to God, He has blessed us abundantly, just as He said He would.

So, we expect our members to be givers because it is one of the ways that Christ grows us as his disciples. The Porters have been growing in this way and want to share their story:

Candy and I have been members at Chapel Hill for about 5 years. We have always given an offering but did not tithe.

Three years ago Candy lost her job of 26 years. She went without a job for 14 months. We were not in a position to live without that income. During that time we did not change our life style, so our debt grew and grew while our giving became less and less.

Fast forward to Pastor Mark's first message of the New Year about the baptism of Jesus. Mark told how, during the Crusades, the knights would be baptized with their sword arm up in the air out of the water. They were willing to surrender everything to Christ... except for their sword arm.

Mark asked us what we were holding above our baptismal waters; what we didn't want to give God control of. For us, it was our wallet. We had sinned with your money. We had not been good stewards and we had held back from God. As we listened, we felt very convicted.

After we came home from that service, Candy and I agreed to tithe from that

moment on. Candy, in a great act of faith, got out the computer and went to the Chapel Hill website and set up an automatic withdrawal of 10% of our income. Each month this amount would be taken out of our bank account and go directly to Chapel Hill.

Now you need to understand we were already in a negative cash flow situation before we tithed. We did not have the money to do this. But we both were so convicted that we knew we had to be faithful, whatever the outcome.

Since that day what has happened is nothing short of a miracle. The following week God saw to it that we got a huge tax refund that we were not expecting. Then God brought me to a new job that was much more stable and had more opportunity for income growth. Then a relative unexpectedly gave us some money. And finally we were approached to be in a pilot class here at Chapel Hill, Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. This class has been transformational for us. We have not been good stewards of our finances, but this class has given us a foundation to build on, the ability to talk, plan and regulate our money.

Most importantly, the best blessing that has come out of this has nothing to do with money. It has to do with our marriage. God has stepped into our marriage and blessed us like never before. Our relationship has never been better.

Our God is a loving and giving God. Candy and I believe all of these blessings we have shared come out of making the commitment to tithe. Thank you.

Are you a good giver? If the Lord were to sit down with you and go over your checkbook, would you be proud of what it revealed to be the priorities of your life? Giving is part of Christian discipleship. That's why it is an expectation of our members. Now if all this sermon did was make you mad... and if you are not a giver... let me risk making you a little bit madder by saying that you may be mad because you recognize that Jesus is not in fact the Lord of this part of your life. You don't want him to be, and you don't like being called out on it. All I can say is, you will become one of those bitter, pinched people I talked about if you never invite the Holy Spirit to teach you how to give. For your own sake—before you become too sour, selfish and awful to be around—fall to your knees and beg God to set you free from this idolatry.

But if some of my words resonate with you but you need direction like the Porters did to determine how to implement God's design for your finances, I would urge you to sign up for our next Financial Peace University. From those who feel like they need more information on how to build a budget, to those who are financially well off but want to be wiser about investments and insurance decisions—everyone has raved about how fun, informative and inspirational Dave Ramsey's class has been. The next Financial Peace University begins September 19, and it could change your

life. There will be an informational meeting after this service in the Gathering Place.

And finally, as a step of faith going forward, I invite everyone here to consider our "Free to Run" campaign. You read about it in the bulletin. Wouldn't it be great if, on the day we are received into the EPC, we could raise enough money in a one-time, above and beyond gift, to retire our entire \$284,000 commitment to the Presbytery of Olympia and use the budget savings to rebuild staff and programs? Cyndi and I have decided to commit a second 10% of our June paycheck to "Free to Run." We invite everyone to consider a tithe of at least one week's income. Figure out what you make in one week, take ten percent of that, and offer it as a way to set us free from this debt. And however much you choose to give, our Session is hopeful that every single member—high school student to retired—will give something... 100% involvement.

Well, I've shared a few reasons why Cyndi and I give. Perhaps this has stirred something in you. I hope so. Anyhow, may our gracious, giving God bless what we have heard today. Amen.

## Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. Pastor Mark mentioned several reasons why he and Cyndi give. Which 1 or 2 did you identify with? Which surprised you?
  2. Do you agree that "giving a prayerfully determined percentage of our income to our church" is a fair membership expectation? Why or why not?