

‘Giving to God’
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper
October 22, 2017
based on Matthew 22:34-46

A beloved uncle of mine once told me a kernel of wisdom I’ve never forgotten. We were talking about marriages and what makes for a successful marriage. He said, “Marriages aren’t 50/50. They just aren’t. A good marriage is 110% and 110%.”

I would expand that equation to our relationship with God. A good relationship with God is 110% and 110%.

God gives us everything and adds grace on top of it. Our response is to give 100% of who we are and then some ... for math’s sake that is symbolized as an additional 10%.

We are to give more than our all to God.

Please pray with me:

Loving God, we come to worship this day open to giving you our all in all. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to receive inspiration and hope in Jesus’ words and way. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

In case you weren’t here last week and heard about Covenant’s plans for 2018 called 8 in 18 ... here it is in a nutshell:

We want to take on 8 Initiatives in 2018 aimed at growth: Spiritual growth and numerical growth. A couple of these Initiatives we are already doing ... but the real key to the success of these Initiatives is that they are inspired by and driven by ... YOU!

Like I said last week, if I (as your pastor) come up with the 8 Initiatives aimed at spiritual and numerical growth ... they are mine, and not yours. I have ownership ... and truth be told, highly unlikely to succeed. Not because I’m not willing, but if the congregation doesn’t own the Initiatives, they are not likely to do well.

The Initiatives are congregationally based.

What I am doing is pledging half my time to help you succeed. Half of what I do now will be rechanneled to helping you succeed in the Initiatives.

Let me give you an example of what kind of Initiative ideas came out of last week’s request for ideas:

- Rebecca Fuss has a passion for a **mid-week Praise & Play** where we invite neighborhood children in for an hour of games, Bible lesson, craft, and/or music; always followed by a supper that includes the children’s families.

- John Cmelko has a passion for (dare I say it out loud) ... **evangelism**: How to train and equip people in sharing their faith. It’s easier than you think ... and just as challenging as you fear it to be. But remember the equation in our relationship with God: 110% and 110%. We simply must get over the fear, or disregard, for sharing our faith and embrace a desire to share in meaningful ways why we come here each week to praise and pray!

- A visitor who was here last week wrote a suggestion down on her bulletin and gave it to me. She would like to see us start an **online Bible study**! That would be cool! Only remember ... we need Initiatives that aren’t driven by me. I love the idea of an online Bible

study ... but I need a driver. I can help train, equip, and inspire ... but I can't be the driver.

Other ideas that have surfaced in dialogue with other group and committees are:

The use of **technology** in worship. The final hurdle of getting this approved was met at the last church council meeting. This Initiative will bring an audio and visual component to worship that will make our worship more interactive and attractive to people who receive and process information from a screen.

The implementation of an organized **Caring Ministry**. Who in our congregation would benefit from a home or hospital visit? Who would appreciate communion being delivered to their home or bedside? How can we provide meals to people in the congregation who need a good home cooked meal from time to time?

An idea that came out of our Creative Thinking Think Tank is to commit to a **Ministry of Presence**. How are we known in our community? What do our parking lot signs and yard signs say about who we are?

We are coming up on the Fall time change. We'll have an extra hour that many of us claim to use for sleep. But what if we did something to convey hope in that hour? We gain that extra hour on Sunday morning so what could we do that our very presence communicated to the neighborhood we are a place of hope?

There is already a group of people working on a **Spirituality of Fundraising**. Fundraising is usually task oriented with a specific goal of making money. But what if fundraising was done in such a way to gather people to Christ? The *main* goal isn't making money ... it's making disciples!

The last idea I'm going to share is what could be described as an **Arts Initiative**. This would include music and the arts. This initiative needs a driver, but the potential for powerful and heart-warming ministry could be amazing.

That's 8 ideas toward 8 in 18 to get us started. Which ones sound like you have energy and passion to help support? What are your ideas?

For those of you who might be asking what's so special about 2018?

I think the answer is ... now's the time. We have been looking into the future for the last several years with not much to show for it. I think we've been dragging our feet waiting for something to happen; or for someone else to make necessary decisions; or for your pastor to get busy and beat the streets for people.

Growing the church in spirit and in number is a congregational task. Participation at the level of 110% requires both financial commitments and time commitments.

Our giving to God should not be a passive endeavor. Sitting here week after week is a very good place to start ... but giving to God requires more. God wants our passion and energy for ministry.

I am convinced passion and energy is contagious and they organically generate both financial and personal time commitments.

Answering God's call for us to give more than we think we have to offer is not easy. It requires sacrifices.

A friend of mine who is an Elder Care Provider said the most debilitating thing for an elderly adult is to lose their mobility. She contends even though it is always possible to build muscle mass, it is vitally important for those of us in their 50's and 60's (and even 70's)

to embrace an active lifestyle that will limit mobility issues later in life.

In other words: ... the more we sacrifice our down time in order to exercise now, the more likely we are to continue being physically active in our 80's and 90's.

Maybe one of our 8 in 18 Initiatives is an exercise program!

The same philosophy should go for our spiritual life and our faith journey. The more we invest in sharing and cultivating a rich and deep faith, the more likely we are to face the end of our earthly journey not shrinking from the mystery of death.

And not only that! We will have left a legacy of faith for others to reap and sow.

The way we cultivate a rich and deep faith is by doing just what we're doing now. Worship and praise to God who is the first to give us everything and adds grace on top of it.

Our response to God's giving to us is to give 100% of who we are and then some ... for math's sake that is symbolized as an additional 10%.

A traditional stewardship sermon would have taken that denarius that the Pharisees showed Jesus and expound on how giving to God is far more important than giving to Caesar. I would have astounded you with numbers and percentages about deficits and slashing the church budget. I might even scare you into believing the church is about to close because too many of us have chosen to favor Caesar over God.

But I think what God really wants is for us to respond to God's gift of amazing grace with 110% of our heart, mind, and soul.

The gifts of time and money are a part of that kind of giving to God.

May it be so with all of us.

Amen.