

## **Sermon on Leviticus 19:9-10: Reaping the Harvest: November 15, 2009**

When you hear this scripture about reaping the harvest the images that may flood your mind are vineyards, cornfields, and in Virginia of course tobacco fields, but what I think about is Potatoes!!! The summer of my 16<sup>th</sup> year of life I went on Harvest of Hope. This youth mission camp, sponsored by the Society of St. Andrew, focuses on teaching youth about world hunger and gives youth the opportunity to glean vegetables. Just as the scripture reads in Leviticus, the food that the youth glean are the vegetables left behind after the farmers have reaped their harvest.

What surprised me when I went gleaning that first day was the amount of potatoes that were in the field. There were potatoes EVERYWHERE! There were large potatoes, small potatoes, potatoes that I thought were potatoes but were really just mounds of dirt. And I found myself thinking...even after these farmers had reaped their harvest they had so much left to offer to God. (Pause) And so do we (Pause). We follow God's command to reap the Harvest of our lives and our pockets when we enter into holiness by giving back to God what is God's (PAUSE).

We do not like to think that our belonging do not belong to us. Most of us would like to operate out of mindset of a country boy:

The country boy said it like this, “Get what you can, can what you get, sit on the can, and try to steal what is in every other can.” (Pause for dramatic effect) These folks live by the Golden Rule, which is “He who has the gold makes the rules.”<sup>i</sup>

Many of us have worked long and hard for the things we now have: houses, cars, savings accounts, that matching bedroom set, DVR, tivo, that new apple computer. Some of us are still working for the things we have. We continue to pay off loans and credit card debt; we save and save to buy a reliable car and the necessities of life. Some of us are just grateful to scrape by every month and dread the bills that the next month brings. Some of us were born with silver spoons in our mouth and have never had to experience the stress that comes with lack of money.

In our American culture today the media has infiltrated our minds with an economy of scarcity: it has taught us that we do not have enough. Our houses are not big enough, our cars are not new enough, and our TVs are not large enough. Mainly the media tells us that we do not have enough and we will never be enough and so we are left searching for the material things that will prove to others that we have more than enough. Having the mindset of the economy of scarcity teaches us to believe the same lie that the serpent told to Eve.

He made her feel like she did not have enough and so to gain more knowledge she and Adam ate the apple. This is what happens when we view the world with the mindset of the economy of scarcity.

We make decisions out of our own self interests and not for the glory of God. It is in this mindset that we view stewardship as taking our tithe from the money that is left over after the bills have been paid...simply giving God what is left of the harvest God has blessed us with.

We must allow God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to reorder our minds to a mindset of abundance which shows us how to make tithing a priority in our lives. Instead of viewing tithing as another bill, we can view it as a discipline of holiness. After all, we are simply taking care of what God has entrusted to us and returning it to God because holiness begins with the treatment of the gifts that God has blessed us with.<sup>ii</sup> Regardless of our monetary status there is something we all have in common; all of the money we have is not ours, but is a gift from God (PAUSE).<sup>iii</sup> Therefore, if we are only stewards taking care of this gift of money then it should not be difficult to give back to God what it God's.

But wait a minute...it is very hard to give back to God what God has entrusted us with. In our humanity we feel that we have earned the right and the privilege to do with our money as we would like according to our own desires. We think we know what is best for us and like Adam and Eve the decisions we make about the things that God entrusts to us are not usually edifying to God or to us.

This is why we have to change our mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance.

In Leviticus 19, God commands for the entire assembly of Israel to reap their harvest and leave a portion for God. This law develops holiness because it causes the Israelites to operate with a mindset of abundance. In this time, wealth was measured by ownership of land. Reaping the harvest was the main way to make a living. By not reaping a portion of their harvest the Israelites lost a large profit, food, and monetary status. God asked them to harvest their crops by going over their field one time and leaving the edges alone. In this way, God ensured that those who did not have monetary status, like the poor, were cared for (PAUSE). In the New Testament God continues to care for us by giving to us. God did not only meet our physical needs, but prepared for us a spiritual harvest. God gave us the ultimate gift of eternal life, through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for the atonement of our sins. God is a giver and God's economy is one of abundance and not scarcity. When we live in the kingdom of God and enter into God's economy we do not lose anything, we simply continue to receive and we always have enough.

God has entrusted each of us with our own harvest of wealth and the way we reap it says something about our stewardship.

God calls us to give back to God because God first gave to us. So, we can either reap the whole harvest for ourselves which stifles the growth of our faith, or we can reap the harvest in a way that is glorying to God and brings us closer to holiness.

In the ministry of Harvest of Hope, all the food gleaned at this youth camp is given to a food bank and distributed to the poor. This is how God's words and work are alive today. How do we as the body of Christ at Warwick Memorial UMC take faithful stewardship to heart? How can we make God's words come alive today and tithe in a way that shows that we believe that God has gifted us with an abundant harvest?

Just as we heard the Scripture about the widow's mite last week, a widow who gave everything she had to God, our Scripture from Leviticus today calls us to a life of Christian sacrifice. What would it mean for us to give up one of our guilty pleasures so that we could give \$15 more dollars to the church a month? Along with the fundraisers we already have, what are some new and different events we can have to raise money for the body of Christ to be God's word alive in the world today?

Just as God instructed all the Israelites in Leviticus, God asks all of us to give back to God a portion of our harvest.

We are all able to give different amounts to God, but every little bit helps further the kingdom of God. We ensure that the body of Christ continues to do the work of God by making that work financially possible. We reap the harvest of our lives and our pockets when we give to God in a manner that causes us to reorder our priorities so that in our spending God is the one who is glorified first and foremost. The economy may continue to decline, we may continue to lose our jobs and investments; the only thing we can count on is that the church will be the constant support for the body of Christ and the surrounding community (Pause).

At a women's conference of 300 women, Tony Campolo, a man passionate about stewardship and social issues refused to pray. The president of the organization read a letter from a missionary requesting \$4,000 for an emergency that had come up. When Tony was asked by the president to pray that God would provide the resources to meet the need of the missionary, Tony flat out said no. He said, "I believe that God has already provided the resources and that all we need to do is give."<sup>iv</sup> He said here's what I'm going to do, I will give all the money I have in my pocket and if we all do the same I think we will see that God has already provided the resources. Tony took \$15 dollars out of his pocket and put it on the table. Reluctantly, the president of the organization emptied her purse and put \$40 on the table. One by one the rest of the ladies filed by and put their money on the

table too. When the money was counted they had collected more than \$4,000 dollars. The lesson is that God has blessed us with the harvest, but we can only reap the harvest when we give God's harvest back to God.

The good news is that God has already given us the ultimate sacrifice in Jesus Christ. All of us can be a part of bringing in the harvest. In Matthew 9, God calls for laborers to be sent out into the harvest. We are the laborers God is calling. We answer this calling when we support the body of Christ financially so that we can go out into the world and reap the harvest for God; it is then that we can enter into holiness. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Lifeway. Short stories on stewardship: God is a Giver. Cited on November 13, 2009: Online: [http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/domoreministry/archives/2007/10/short\\_stories\\_o\\_2.html](http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/domoreministry/archives/2007/10/short_stories_o_2.html).

<sup>ii</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible* vol. 1 (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 1995), 1133.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Brian Kluth. Biblical Generosity Resources and Training: "Tony Campolo at a Women's Conference." Cited November 13, 2009. Online: <http://www.kluth.org/church/Illustrations,%20stories,%20humor%20and%20quotes.pdf>