

“Transformation”
Genesis 32:22-31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor is scary. And yet, Christians are called to tithe from their Life Wallet financially. Tithing is an act of obedience. For some, tithing is aspirational and for others a reality. Together we all need to move obediently toward being tithers. Take note of these Early Church leaders and their thoughts on giving to the poor:

Ambrose (theologian and church leader, 4th century) wrote: “There is your brother, naked and crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering.”

Basil the Great (theologian and bishop in modern-day Turkey, 4th century) wrote, “The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor.”

John Chrysostom (theologian and pastor, 4th century) said, “The almsgiver is a harbour for those in necessity: a harbour receives all who have encountered shipwreck, and frees them from danger; whether they are bad or good. ... escorts them into his own shelter. So you likewise, when you see on earth the man who has encountered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, do not seek an account of his life, but free him from his misfortune.”¹

The examples above tie directly to Matthew 25. When we serve the least, we serve Jesus. Your aspirational or literal tithe funds Geneva’s ministries on this campus and ministries locally, nationally, and internationally. God is the foundation, architect, and builder of the transformational story of health (emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial). And we are to participate with God in the writing of that story of transformation.

¹As found on preachingtoday.com. All three citations submitted by Kevin Miller, Wheaton, Illinois. Ambrose and Basil the Great are also found in Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Illumined Heart: Capture the Faith of Ancient Christians* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Paraclete Press, 2001), 89.

The texts in Genesis 32:22-31, Psalm 121, 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5, and Luke 18:1-8 demand that we accept and believe that God's very self is drawn into the details of our emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial health. This clearly demonstrates that God literally allows us to embody the will of God. The will of God is to be no longer separated from God in any way, shape, or form. More of your Life Wallet must be given away for the sake of others. Your emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial capital cannot save yourself or anyone else. God's unconditional love and faithfulness does. You are to be active and courageous in your choices.

Genesis 32:24-30 reads,

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

Psalm 121:2 reads, "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth."

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul writes, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

Luke 18:1 reads, "Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart."

Like Jacob wrestling with God for the benefit of people of God, like David holding steadfast to the promise that his help comes from God, like Paul reminding followers of Jesus that all Scripture is inspired by God for their benefit, and Jesus raising up the need for his followers to pray always and not lose heart, the body of Christ is to do the same.

Christians make up the body of Christ. And this is a global presence. All are to live their lives, tithing from their Life Wallet, for the sake of the least of these. For some, there is not much in their Life Wallet. For others there is an overabundance. All Christians participate in this plan of salvation for the common good. Thom S. Rainer in *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* writes, “When a church ceases to have a heart and ministry for its community, it is on the path toward death. Whenever local churches are mentioned in the New Testament, they are always exhorted to be other-centered...Vibrant and living churches look after the interests of others. They are concerned for their communities. They open the door for others.”² The community of faith at Geneva Presbyterian Church does not exist for itself. We are entrusted with the promise of redemption for others. That is why tithing from your Life Wallet is essential for your emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial health. Your tithing is equally important for the sake of others.

We are a community of followers of Jesus who embrace brokenness, ours, and that of others. With the beginning of the church in the first century, God’s kingdom was opened to all people. People were valued not for their wealth and power, but because they were created in the image of God. Let’s be a community of faith at Geneva that is known as a center of hope and advocacy for a better way for all people. To tithe from your Life Wallet, will demonstrate simplicity, welcoming the stranger, charity, and justice on behalf of the “least of these” and all people. It is true that God’s unconditional love and faithfulness through you brings salvation to others. And God’s mercy is reliable.³

²Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 28.

³In the three paragraphs of biblical interpretation above, I have benefited from the thinking of Tim Meadowcroft, Fairfax F. Fair, David Gambrell, David W. Johnson, Cleophus J. Larue Vanthanh Nguyen, and Stephen I. Wright in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 391-393, 393-395, 396-398, 399-401, 401-402, 403-404, and 405-406.

Being an inclusive and welcoming congregation, focused on Jesus Christ, is essential for Geneva's better tomorrow. Yes, ethnic and economic diversity, younger families and the over fifty-five crowd are essential to Geneva's existence. Let go of the past and lean into Geneva's Vision . Give yourself (your Life Wallet) away. Tithe on your emotional, physical, spiritual, and financial health. Transformation of you and others occurs. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
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