



Dear Friends,

"Thanks be to God!" We say this at the end of every service before we go our separate ways. I've not yet had anyone say this at the end of one of my sermons – at least, not out loud! But it is a proper response and affirmation that, during our time in worship, we have received the "means of grace and the hope of glory." Saying, "Thanks be to God" is a down-payment we make with our words that reflect our intention to embody gratitude in our actions every day and every week.

But that doesn't mean it is easy... practicing thanksgiving is a discipline we take on with intentionality and purpose. Henri Nouwen writes, "The discipline of thanksgiving is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy." Nouwen is not undermining the value of hard work but communicating the truth that – when all is said and done – we have nothing without God. Discipleship, therefore, is intrinsically wrapped up in learning how to give sacrificially, as God in Christ has done for us with his very life. Therefore, we say, thanks be to **God!**

Perhaps you have heard the old joke about giving: Two men were marooned on an island. One man paced back and forth worried and scared while the other man sat back sunning himself. The first man said to the second: "aren't you afraid we are going to die here?" "No," said the second man, "I make \$400,000 a year and give faithfully to my church every week. My pastor will find me."

I hope you do not experience our *Every Member Canvass* pledge campaign as an attempt to squeeze you for more money. But neither am I embarrassed to ask you to consider sharing financial resources with the church, as Christians have for centuries. Early testimony from the first local congregation in history – the church in Jerusalem – tell us about an early church leader, Barnabas, who "sold a field that belonged to him and then brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37).

Every fall we ask *each member* to prayerfully consider making a pledge to the church. This enables us to build our budget for the upcoming calendar year. How might your decision to pledge be an expression of thanksgiving for the blessings in your life as well as an opportunity to grow in faith? Join me in praying that pledging households would increase both through the addition of new pledges and in the size of pledges.

Regardless of your response to this annual appeal, I thank you for your fresh consideration of God's generosity to you in the person of Christ, and the gift of membership in a church that seeks to be ever more faithful in a very broken world. Knowing you as I do, I have every confidence that we will witness further progress in our stewardship this year, and I thank you for your godly generosity. Thanks be to God!

Yours in Christ,

Clint Wilson+