

THE
DANGEROUS
DUTY



OF
SOUL
WATCHING

SEVEN
DAY
JOURNAL



FIRST FAMILY
CHURCH

THE WINDOW OF OUR CITY

KNOW

Ankeny is a city of 29 square miles with over 62,000 people. The median age is 32, and it is growing by a rate of just under 6.5%. Conservative estimates are that Ankeny could reach 130,000 people by 2040.

READ

Matthew 9:35–37
Colossians 4:3–5

THINK

1. What does Ankeny's growing population tell you about the opportunities coming your way?

2. How should a follower of Christ look at multitudes of people?

3. If you're wanting to get further away from people who need Jesus, what does that indicate about your own heart?

THE WINDOW OF MY PRIORITIES

KNOW

Many of us have heard, or said ourselves, that we don't have time to be in a worship gathering, small group, go on a mission trip, etc. What if the reason that we think that we don't have enough time is really because our priorities are messed up?

READ

Matthew 6:33
Philippians 2:3-4

THINK

1. Rank the following according to the passages above (family, relationship with Christ, work, hobbies, and friends). Now rank them according to your lifestyle.

2. How does reordering our priorities affect our relationship with God (vertical) and with people (horizontal)?

3. What in your life has taken priority over the Lord? Confess that to Him and begin reorganizing your priorities according the leading of the Holy Spirit by listing 3 things you can do to make Jesus your number one priority.

THE WINDOW OF MY HABITS

KNOW

Habits are one of God's greatest blessings. We perform thousands of tasks every day without thinking. They are second nature to us. This is the power of a habit. Too often, however, we fail to pay attention to our habits. Some are good, but others lead us on the path to destruction. Habits are the best of servants, and the worst of masters.

READ

Romans 6:19
1 Timothy 4:7

THINK

1. Identify one habit you would like to change or add to your life.

2. Commit to developing this habit (or breaking this habit) for the next 21 days. Build in accountability. Share with your small group the habit you are working to develop (or break).

3. After you have mastered this one habit (or broke the power of this habit), identify one more habit and repeat. The key is to stack good habits on top of each other.

“LIVING AND GIVING FOR THE GLORY OF GOD”

At First Family, giving is one of the ways we, as disciples of Jesus, “obey all that he has commanded us” (Matthew 28:19–20). Therefore, we, the elders at First Family, gladly engage in and encourage the body here to excel in the grace of giving cheerfully and willingly (2 Cor. 9:7,11).

This simple practice is supported by a wellspring of principles from both the Old and New Testaments, and they provide for us a strong understanding of giving throughout biblical history. Giving throughout the entire Bible not only served to meet the needs of the recipients, but also benefited the giver. Most importantly, disciplined and cheerful giving results in glorifying God. At First Family, we believe giving was and is governed and characterized by the following principles:

It was and is prioritized. The Hebrews were to bring their best and their first, both of animals and harvests (Lev. 1–5; Proverbs 3:9–10). And Paul instructed the early churches to gather their resources together on the first day of week (1 Cor. 16:1–2). While giving on any day of the week is appropriate, we see the principle of priority shine through in that we should set aside our spiritual gifts before we do other things with our money and our time.

It was and is responsive. God wasn’t looking just for a gift; he wanted their heart. Several times the Psalmists and prophets reminded us God desires a broken heart and a contrite spirit more than a bull or goat. And the Macedonian believers “gave themselves first to the Lord, then...to us” (2 Cor. 8:5). More than money, God wants you. This also shows us that spiritual investing is far more than a financial issue. Our time and talent are equally important gifts we bring to the Lord in response to all that he has done for us and is to us.

Incidentally, this response, in both Testaments, was rooted in joy. Not only were the Hebrews to celebrate during many of their feasts and festivals, which included many offerings (Lev. 16, 23), Nehemiah actually commanded the newly-planted people back in Jerusalem to reinstitute the Feast of Booths with joy, not sadness, for this was where their strength was found – “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). Amazingly, he and Ezra plainly instructed them to obey the law and its sacrificial obligations, not with tears, but instead with cheers. Paul likewise encouraged the New Testament disciples to give cheerfully and willingly, not grudgingly. It is no doubt a call to gladly sacrifice for our God who has made redemption and reconciliation possible through the sacrifice his Son, Jesus!

It was and is proportionate. While this portion was rooted in a legal percentage in the Old Testament (a tithe=10%), this portion is now a matter of the Spirit’s leading. Phrases like “as he may prosper” (1 Cor. 16:3) and “according to their means” (2 Cor. 8:3) indicate there is freedom to give as God directs, not as the law demanded. While we believe a tithe of our overall income is a good guide to use in starting to give, we do not believe it is the “legal limit.” Frankly, we encourage our people to use the tithe to the local church as a guide to start, and then to progress to an even more sacrificial lifestyle of generous giving.

It was and is sacrificial. Whether you gave your best lamb on the altar (Lev 1:3) or your most recent property to the church to help the poor (Acts 2:44–45; Acts 4:34–35), true giving has always been painful and costly. In fact, the Apostle Paul complimented the Macedonians for how they gave above and beyond their capacity by saying they “gave ...beyond their means ...” (2 Cor. 8:3). This was simply a way to say they gave till it hurt — sacrificially.

It was and is regular. The Jewish calendar was full of rhythmic giving, rooted in the weekly Sabbath and the annual seasons. And the New Testament uses the imagery of “sowing and reaping” (2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7–10) to talk about giving, indicating it is a regular, on-going kind of work. In fact, the whole point of Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 16 is that giving should be regular, not rash.

It was and is personal. While some may see this as a no-brainer, it is important to emphasize that no where in Scripture do we see someone bringing a gift or sacrifice on another’s behalf. There is no “giving by proxy” in the Bible. Specific pronouns like “one” in 2 Cor. 9:7 as well as the phrase “each of you” in 1 Cor. 16:2 teach us that biblical giving is an individual investment.

Speaking of the personal aspects of giving, it is not selfish to think correctly about how true, sacrificial giving affects, even benefits, the one who gives. Admittedly, the benefits may not be according to how our culture defines “benefits,” but God uses properly-motivated giving in the giver’s life to 1) help confirm our salvation (1John 3:16–19), 2) keep us humble and focused on God instead of man (Matt 6:1–4), 3) provide heavenly treasure (Matt 6:19–21), and 4) build faith in the promise and power of God to meet our own needs (Phil. 4:19). These are at least four “benefits” that a true giver will discover as he or she engages in giving in a personal way.

It was directed. Both Testaments show that giving wasn’t “shotgunned” around based on the whim of the individual, but rather “lasered” through the tabernacle (OT) or church (NT). Granted — during harvests the reapers would leave the ends of the fields for the poor, as well as whatever fell on the ground while they were harvesting (Lev 23). And the Apostles encouraged the early Christians to give to others in need in the course of their everyday life (1 John 3:17–18). But the weight of Scripture shows that the followers of the Lord were to direct their giving to the church so that it could be combined and used in a greater and more significant manner (Acts 4:34; Phil. 4:14–18).

