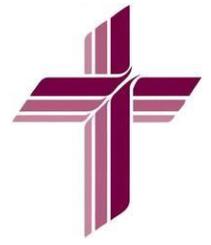




# ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

505 E. Carpenter Street  
Midland, MI 48640  
(989) 835-5861  
sjlmidland.org



Pastor Daniel Kempin

Pastor Joshua Parsons

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Dear Co-workers in the Kingdom,

Back in the classic days of automobiles, there was a man named Paul whose brother, flush with recent success, bought him a brand new car for Christmas. It was a thing of beauty—shiny chrome and polished paint, with a very satisfying rumble of power when the engine was running. Paul enjoyed the car very much and always took care to see that it looked as impressive as it drove.

One day, after a stop in the city, the man returned to his car to find a young boy gazing at it with awe. Paul had seen this look before, and as usual he let the boy have a closer look. He saved the best part of his story for last, though, and after explaining all of the features and luxuries he said, “My brother gave me this car. He gave it to me as a Christmas gift.”

The young boy's eyes opened even wider, and he said, “You're kiddin', mister! Your brother just gave it to you, and it didn't cost you nothin'?”

“Yes,” said that man.

“Boy, I wish . . .” said the boy, and he hesitated with a wistful look on his face. Paul had seen that look dozens of times before as young boys looked at his shiny car, but what came next was a total surprise.

*“I wish I could be that kind of a brother.”*

It is a lesson from the heart of a child reminding us that the greater joy in wealth is not in having it, but in putting it to generous use.

This year's stewardship campaign is on “The Art Of Abundance,” as we consider the proper attitude and use of the abundance that the Lord brings into our lives. Last week we considered scripture that reveals God's desire to give us abundance. This week I would like you to think on the principle that *for this abundance to be truly enjoyed, it must be shared.*

Consider the Old Testament commandment on giving. (Exodus 24:36) The Lord had promised that He would bring the people safely to the promised land, and that He would see that their crops flourished. However, as they received this abundant blessing, they were to *first* bring an offering and give of the “first fruits” of their land. Notice how the Lord insisted that giving was a part of their blessing. If they continued to give joyfully of their blessings, then their abundance would continue, but if they withheld their blessings and did not share, then they would lose their blessings. It is an insight based not on accounting, but on faith. In giving, we express our trust that God will provide, we imitate His giving love, and we learn the best and highest use of abundance--namely the joy of sharing with others. And in doing so, we become more fit to receive abundant blessings from the hand of God.

You see, God could have just said, "I will provide for you so that you will have enough." But instead, He said, "I will give you MORE than enough--and you are to learn to trust me in this by bringing your tithes first to me."

That is a direct challenge of faith from the Lord Himself. It is something that cannot be learned intellectually--you have to actually DO it in order to understand it. The power of giving is in the fact that it is a choice. You do not have to do it. You have enough bills and taxes that you pay without a choice. But the offerings that the Lord promises to bless are the ones that are given freely.

So I put the challenge before you to discover the joy of freedom. If you trust that God will give you enough abundance to share, then find a way in which you choose to give. Do so with the understanding that God doesn't need you to do it, and see if you do not find joy and satisfaction when you see that your gift is a blessing and know that your faith in God's generosity has been vindicated.

Please pray now and seek the Lord's will for what your response will be on Loyalty Sunday, March 3. Whatever you choose to give, commit it with prayer to the work of the Lord's kingdom, and please continue to pray for the health and unity of this place and for the wisdom of those who serve.

Until next week, please consider: **John 15:15-18** and **1 Timothy 6:18-19**.

Your servant in Christ,

-Pastor Kempin