

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Spiritual Budgeting"
Dr. J. Dent

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As we transition to the Fall and all the wonderful activities available to us, I'm here today to encourage you to budget wisely. Now whether you have been a part of this congregation for a long time, or whether you are new or whether you are listening to this service on the radio, you each have a responsibility before God to budget your life spiritually.

Most of us know what it means to budget our money. And whether you are very good at budgeting your money or not, there is only so much, and sooner or later it runs out. Even when you have overdrafts and lines of credit and credit cards and mortgages and loans of all kinds, nevertheless, there is a point where you must choose something and not have something else.

Similarly most of us have budgeted our time as well. We only have so much of it. Whether we have given a priority to our jobs or our school schedules or our recreation or our TV, mp3 or volunteer work, whatever it is, we only have so much time. And so whether we do it consciously or unconsciously, each of us have budgeted our time and our money. It's quite easy to chart. Just take a weekly schedule that shows your waking hours, between say 6 a.m. and midnight every day. Then look up your financial records, whether chequing or savings or credit card statements, and you can figure out pretty easily what you have spent.

But spiritual budgeting doesn't seem quite as easy. It involves your interior life, the part of you that only you know (and God). It is the devotional part of your life, what you pray, what you read, whether you read Scripture regularly, what other kinds of books you read to encourage your spiritual growth, your understanding of your Christianity and most of all your relationship to Jesus Christ.

That kind of budgeting doesn't perhaps enter our thinking as much as the time and the money. By the way, the time and the money will tell you a lot about your spirituality as well. More on that at another time.

But first, listen to what Jesus says to you about your spiritual budgeting. He basically tells us that we only have so many chips on the roulette table of

life. And we must decide how many we will place on Him and His values, His way, His priorities.

So he challenges us. Don't be a half-way Christian. Don't be a Christian when it suits you or just on Sunday. Don't be someone who starts to build a cabin in the country but never finishes it. Actually the tower Jesus mentions in Luke was more like building a skyscraper, but only getting to the hole in the ground foundational part.

There's a town in British Columbia called Kimberley. The mine closed there but it is still a beautiful place to ski. They changed the downtown so it would resemble a Bavarian little town. They also bulldozed a whole city block across the street from where the Presbyterian church is. That was good for parking. But over ten years later nothing was done with that property. It had the chain link fence around it, but whoever decided to bulldoze it never planned well enough to finish the project. Not even well enough to start the foundations and walls.

So Jesus says, don't let your Christianity be like that. Don't let it be something that your parents did for you when you were little, but you never invested or investigated it further.

I grew up in a little Anglican church in Southern California, baptized and confirmed. Many of you grew up somewhere away in some other tradition than Presbyterianism. I never understood until my teen years that Christianity was first and foremost a relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. I thought it was just going to church and trying to being good. It was in a home Bible Study class that some fellow teen music students invited me (some young women as I remember) and helped me to understand that Christianity is primarily a commitment of yourself to Christ and His ways. That we don't naturally go that way, and that each one of us must renounce our rebellion against God and publicly commit ourselves to Him. It was a revelation to me. And I was very grateful. If you are going to build a tower called your Christian life, then make sure you can keep building to the end of your life. Don't stop. Others might see and ridicule your building project. Make that public commitment to Jesus and include this congregation or your own congregation as you choose to go further with God.

Jesus tells us it is like we have a personal army. We have the army of our dollars and our minutes. And God is coming with His army of His resources and His time beyond time. We need to know what His terms are before we begin to fight our life against His. What terms does He propose to us lest His forces devour ours in the end?

It's all about calculating the cost of this living relationship with the Living God. Because your commitment to Christ does cost you, if it is indeed authentic Christianity. If it does not cost you anything, then you have not counted the cost and yielded all the way Jesus is encouraging us right now.

So the first step is to know you are committed to Christ and going to heaven. The second step is to look over your life, or rather let Him look over your life and ask Him what He would like to do with this life of mine. Just say: O God, my life is yours.

Someone (Dr. Boice?) used to talk about the analogy of your heart as your house. Jesus is knocking at the door of our hearts, as it says in Revelation 3:20. He wants to come in, and then he wants to explore every part of the house, just like you might do when you are about to make a major real estate purchase. He wants to see your kitchen, your closets, your basement, your bedroom, your office every part of your house and your life, your old files and new ones. He wants the keys to the house and he wants into your garage and driveway and the keys to the car. Now you might say he wants an awful lot, until you remember you are talking to God. But that is the Step Two in every 12 step program: Turning your life over to the One who can manage it better than you can.

And then we can talk about what that might look like in terms of church activities. I know we are all busy. I know some of us aren't well enough to take in a lot of church activities. I tell people to come regularly to Sunday worship and to one other church activity a week. Sunday isn't enough. And being here every day is too much. But perhaps you can join the Friday Bible Study or the Mission group or the Good Companions or a Bible Study that I am going to lead. Perhaps you can join the choir or consider offering your home for a small group.

Because the Church is more than just a Sunday morning thing at ten or eleven o'clock, it is how you strengthen the relationship you have with Christ and with His family. It is also how well we invite others into this

relationship, whether at the university or at the high school or in your business or in your family or neighbors. All of this costs you something. Time is the minimum commitment: your personal time of getting to know Jesus better and your corporate time with the church.

Some of you have been hurt by the church or find that it is not relevant to your needs. May I stand in on behalf of the church and/or church leaders that have hurt you, and ask your forgiveness. Perhaps there is someone or some group you need to address to be reconciled with them. Start with forgiveness and then remember how much Christ loves the church which he calls His body, His family, His bride.

He desperately loves the church and we are to desire him more and more. We are his vehicle to love others and care for ourselves as well.

I've been doing this work for more than twenty years and it's hard to know what to schedule and where. It's hard to know what activities to do and what new things to start. I'd love to start something in connection with the university for students and for international students. The whole world is on our door step. I'd love to start something in connection with other youth in the congregation. I'd love to do home bible studies most nights of the week. I'd love to have more times of prayer and intercession for important decisions, because we've lost corporate prayer in the church and the urgency of prayer groups. I'd like to see marriages strengthened and parents encouraged and children excited about coming to church and learning about this One who is the Author of Life. I'd love to see ministries to single people and seniors and lonely people, poor and wealthy, all ethnicities, all kinds of backgrounds coming together under the deep love of Christ.

We are already here. We have been here since 1775. But the question is, "How will we be faithful to this generation, this time in the twenty-first century?" I can do some things, I can tell you what I think. But it will only happen as many of us say "yes" to a greater vision of what we should be in this place. Many are already giving sacrificially of their time here. Don't hear me wrongly in this regard... Many more of us need to hear Christ's challenge to completely sell out to Him.

He can do amazing things with us. He already has. But what are some of the things you would like to see the church do? Call us. Tell me. Tell the elders. If you are not a part of this congregation, call your own parish. Help

us together be more than we currently are. Help us together be a place of wonders.

And tell us what you think about cooperating with other Christian congregations, with St. Andrew's, our sister congregation, but also with the Anglicans, with the Baptists, with the Salvation Army, the Catholics, the United, the Pentecostal and perhaps there are others that I have not named. All of us together are hearing the call to commitment anew this weekend and next in some form or another.

The profile of Christianity may have lessened here in Newfoundland when the schools became non-denominational ten years ago, but the need for everyone to look again at their personal time, money and devotion has never been greater.

And no matter what decisions you come to, remember to be thankful. A couple of weeks ago, I made a plea to lengthen the season of Thanksgiving from the blueberry harvest to the traditional October Monday holiday. Let's be thankful for what God has already given us and look forward to what He is going to do with wonderful surprises that none of us will know in advance, more than we can ask or imagine...

Let us pray.