Presbyterians are people of strong considered opinions who don’t mind expressing them loudly and often; i.e., Presbyterians are a little ornery by our very nature. Today, I am thinking of a friend of mine, John Williamson, who passed away a couple of years ago who was a person of very strong opinions where stewardship is concerned. When I grew up in my home church John was a member and father of a fellow classmate of mine in high school. John was a “church hopper” and by that I mean he was probably a member of every Presbyterian Church in the South Hills at least once. We crossed paths again in two other churches! John was a tither, which is to say he gave ten percent of everything he had to the Lord. He taught me a lot of what I know about stewardship. But John was absolutely adamant on one aspect of stewardship. He would state and reiterate over and over again his view that—stewardship is giving to the Lord, “a tangible way of expressing (our) love for Him, to HIM, pure and simple.”

(Letter from John Williamson, February 24, 2014) Anytime I tried to make stewardship something other than that I would get a call from John and I would receive a letter from him, reiterating that giving to the Lord is exclusively a tangible way of expressing our Love for God, period, pure and simple, nothing more, nothing less.

So for example, if I were to say we ought to give generously this year because our Christian Ed Program has begun to grow under the wonderful tutelage of Lois Core (more children in Sunday School last week than on Rally Day! Praise God!) I would get a letter and a phone call from John saying, its not about what it produces, its about a pure and simple expression of our love for God. As I say, he was ornery. If I would speak from the pulpit, say, how blessed we are with the Young Adult Discipleship Group meeting at 11am on Sundays now and that there were (13?) people in it last Sunday, and how grateful we are for bringing Pastor Scott on board and providing for his salary because he’s the one initiating this (Praise God, people both worshipping AND studying!) I would get a letter and a phone call from John saying, No, Stu, you’re wrong—stewardship is only about expressing our love for God pure and simple. Ornery! If I said in a sermon, don’t we want to get back to ten percent of our pledges going for mission and its going to take everyone getting involved to move us toward that goal. Every pledge matters. I would get a letter and a phone call from John saying, no matter how good it is to give money to mission, the point of stewardship is our expression of love for God. And if I had the temerity to then go on to suggest that we need to give generously and pledge sacrificially in order to bring our new Director of Children, Youth and Families on board next year and to continue the momentum we are currently creating. I would soon get a letter and a phone call from John saying, Nope, Stu, its purely and simply about our love for God. What we give and how we give expresses our love and appreciation for what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Message received, John; message received. Stewardship is about our love for God, pure and simple.

Our scripture verses for today are the story of the ten lepers healed by Jesus. I want us to consider that leprosy represents our sinful, fallen nature. Lepers in that time were isolated from everyone else in society because of their disease. The inherent disease of the human condition is our sin, our fallen-ness, and the great divide between God and humanity that humanity causes itself by its own sin. So God has sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, in order to heal that sin through the blood of His cross. To bridge the gap between humanity and God through a Living Savior. To heal the disfiguring sin of the human heart by the ugliness and spiritual beauty of the cross. To cure the leprosy of the soul that divides us from one another; the leprosy of the soul that divides us from God. Accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, believe that what Jesus has done Jesus has done for you, and your leprosy is healed. You are restored and forgiven; washed clean and made whole by the blood of the cross. We are disfigured and isolated by our sin, as were the lepers by their leprosy. We are made clean and reconciled by Jesus.
So Jesus heals ten lepers that day. And He instructs them to go show themselves to the priests. When a leper is healed they must show themselves to the priests and only then can they be readmitted to society. When they are healed they can truly be connected to God and return to the Temple; they can return to their homes and family and be re-connected with people. So nine of the ten now healed lepers run off to do this. They want not only to be healed but they want to resume their normal life. We can’t blame them really. But one healed leper as he is making his way to show himself to the priests stops and comes to himself and turns around and goes back to Jesus. He comes to express his thanks and gratitude to the One who has healed him. He comes back to Jesus to worship Him and thank Him and express his gratitude to his Lord and Savior –the One who has made him clean and whole. Verse 16 “(the tenth leper) fell on his face at Jesus’ feet, giving Him thanks.” (Luke 17: 16) It was a pure and simple expression of his love for Jesus. Jesus asks the question, it is the question of the day: “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?” v. 17

Every one who names the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their life has been healed of their sin because of what Jesus has done for them at Calvary. Every one of us have been healed by Jesus. Made clean by the blood of His cross. Ransomed, restored, forgiven by Jesus.

- There are probably 250 people today in worship. But we have 750 members of our church. Were not 750 cleansed? Where are the other 500? Where are the other nine?
- There are probably 200 people who volunteer their time in service to the church on a monthly basis through mission and service to the church. But we have 750 members of our church. Were not 750 cleansed? Where are the other 500? Where are the other nine?
- According to the bulletin last week, currently there are 107 pledges to the 2020 Covenant Fund. There are more than 450 giving units here at the church. Where are the other 443 units? Where are the other nine? Where are the nine?, asks Jesus...

Stewardship is the pure and simple expression of our love for Jesus. Gratitude and thankfulness flow naturally and abundantly from a heart in which Jesus dwells. 750 lepers have been healed at The Church of the Covenant. Were not ten healed? Where are the other nine? In the gratitude department EVERY PLEDGE MATTERS, because every pledge is an expression of our love and gratitude to the Lord Jesus for what He has done for us.

I conclude with a little word study. When Jesus heals the ten lepers the Greek word that is used ekatharisthesan, means “cleansed”. That means that the disease of leprosy was cured. The white lesions eating away the skin were gone; the scars and disfigurement remained but the disease was cleansed. But when the tenth leper returns to give thanks and gratitude to Jesus, Jesus says, “Your faith has made you whole” v. 19 The Greek word is seisokein, meaning whole and restored in its entirety. In other words the nine were cured of their sin but the one who returned with gratitude to Jesus, he alone, was restored; his disfigurement from his disease was reversed, the nose and the ears that had been eaten away were restored; the digits, the fingers and toes lost to the disease returned. He wasn’t only healed; he was restored. He wasn’t only forgiven; he was given a new and abundant life. It is the profound difference for the Christian who returns to Jesus with their full heart filled with gratitude to serve and worship and give with all that is within them. Those Christians are not only forgiven, they are restored and made whole again. It is why stewardship is about love for God, pure and simple. It is why EVERY PLEDGE MATTERS. Because every pledge is an expression of our gratitude and a prayer that by Jesus we might not only be forgiven but also restored and made whole once again. Jesus asks: “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?” Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!