

## “A Biblical Pattern For Giving”

“The church is always asking for money....”. Have you ever heard that? Have you ever *said* that? Maybe some churches do harp on money too much. But there are some people who feel the pastor should never preach on giving, or the church should never challenge its members to give!

***Jesus talked about money.*** He talked *a lot* about money. Based on what we read in the New Testament, Jesus talked more about money and our relationship to material things than He did about prayer!

My approach over the years has been to preach one sermon a year on giving, and not hound the church the rest of the year. I try to present *what the Bible says* without hesitation or apology. Over many years serving churches God has honored that approach!

God has not left us in the dark as to how to give, and how much to give. So today I want to turn to the Bible and look at some basic principles of giving to the Lord and His work.

***First of all, the Bible teaches that we are stewards/managers, not owners of life and its gifts.*** “Stewardship” is a word we use in church, but not much outside the church. A “steward” is a manager, a caretaker, as opposed to an owner. The Bible says we don’t own anything. It all belongs to God. And someday we must give an account of what we do with what God has entrusted to us. Some people are or insulted when you say we don’t own anything. “Don’t tell me my money isn’t mine!” “Don’t tell me all I’ve worked for isn’t mine!” I’ll tell you what. If you still have a problem with this, let’s talk privately about it. Make appointment to see me – *100 years from now.*

***Secondly, the Bible says that our giving should be in response to what God has done for us.*** Jesus once said, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). God has provided for our *physical needs*: We here are not among the poorest of the poor in the world. Even if we are struggling financially, we’re better off than most people in the world. God also provided for our *spiritual and eternal needs*: through Jesus God offers us forgiveness of our sins, a new life in Christ, and everlasting life with Him in heaven. So, when give, we are saying, “*Thank you, God, for all You have given us and all You have done for us!*”

***Thirdly, the Bible says we are to give with the right attitude: that is, willingly and cheerfully.*** 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” The New Testament word, the Greek word, translated “cheerful” is the word *hilaros* (from which we get the word “hilarity”). “Cheerful” is a weak rendering of the Greek. We are to give in a hilarious manner! Someone has quipped: “God loves a cheerful giver, but He receiveth from a grouch!” But if we have to be coaxed to give, or give with a begrudging spirit, we might as well forget it! Imagine you’re receiving a birthday present, and the person giving you the gift says, “You know, I hate this - that I’m expected to give you a present for your birthday. But here’s your gift anyway!” Or, you get a Christmas gift, and the giver says to you, “I’m really low on money this Christmas. I’d rather not give anything. But I felt obligated to give something.” How would you feel? You

would probably think, “Well, you can just take your lousy gift and shove it!” We are to give *willingly*, and with a *hilarious spirit*!

***Then, the Bible instructs us to give regularly.*** 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.” Notice, “on the first day of every week” – i.e. *regularly*. This doesn’t mean we have to give every week. Some give when they get paid – weekly, or bi-weekly, or monthly (e.g. those on Social Security). The point is: Give on a regular basis.

*It’s a good practice to set aside our offering to the Lord first.* The Hebrews had what they called “first-fruits”. Proverbs 3:9-10 refers to this. “Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” While *everything* belongs to God, the *first tenth of the crop or harvest* belonged to God in a special way. It was sacred. One dare not keep this for yourself!

Practically speaking, what often happens if we don’t pay the Lord first? Well, we pay the mortgage or rent, car payments, Visa or Mastercard, the electric, the phone bill, groceries, insurance – and by the time we’re done, we may not have much left to put in the church offering plate. So, is it *first fruits* or *leftovers* that we give to God?

*Regular, systematic giving has great benefits.* It benefits the church: it provides a steady flow of income to carry out ministry throughout the year. Regular, systematic giving also benefits us, the giver. Giving is a spiritual discipline that helps us grow; a practice just as important as regular prayer or Bible study or worshiping. Even if this church were fully endowed and needed no income, I would still preach on giving, because we need to *give* in order to *grow* spiritually! Herb Miller, a leader in the field of Christian stewardship, once said, “The giver gives because of the giver’s need to give and not the church’s need to receive.”

***The Bible also guides Christians to give proportionately.*** Deuteronomy 16:17 instructs, “Each of you must bring a gift *in proportion* to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.” Again, from 1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of every week each of you is to put something aside and store it up, *as he may prosper.*”

We can’t all give the same amount. So we should give based on how God has blessed us financially. *Some of us are doing well financially:* God has blessed us and we have money to spare. *Others don’t have much to give:* you are struggling to make ends meet. A math teacher asked a student: “If you have \$20 in one pocket and \$50 in another pocket, what do you have?” The student replied: “I have on someone else’s pants!”

We can’t all give the same amount. Occasionally churches try to get more money by saying, “If every member gave \$50 a week, we’d be OK.” Or, if the church is running low on income, someone may suggest that if everybody in the church would give \$10.00 or \$15.00 more a week, the problem would be fixed. What’s the flaw in this approach? It is that not everybody’s able to give equally. For some of us to give \$50 a week would push us to the limit. For others, we can

easily give \$100 or \$200 or more a week and not even feel the pinch.

*God has not entirely left it up to our own judgment as to what to give. There is a norm, a standard, throughout the Bible by which we can measure our giving: it is the TITHE (10%).* The tithe was required in the Old Testament, under law. When we get to the New Testament, it is more or less assumed that since now we are living under grace, that Christians give at least as much as what was required under the Old Testament law. Now I know, as soon as I mention “tithing” some may get all bent out of shape! You hyperventilate! “No way I could give that much!” Listen: There are promises in the Bible that say if we are willing to tithe, and give God at least the 10% that’s rightfully His, God will provide our needs. Check out what it says in Malachi 3:8-10: “Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”

Malachi says the people are robbing God! How? By withholding the tithes. Then God says: *Test Me!* Give Me the full tithe, and see if I won’t pour out an overflowing blessing on you!

If you’re not willing to tithe for the rest of your life, would you try it *for 2 or 3 months?* Test God! If God doesn’t provide, then stop tithing! I personally have never met anyone who started to tithe and had to quit, because God didn’t keep His promise to provide their needs. If you’re not willing to take a step of faith and tithe, would you gradually move up in increments to the 10% or more amount? So, if you are now giving 2% of your income to the Lord, can you step up to 3% or 4%? Are you giving 5%? Can you step up to 6% or 7%, *with the goal of reaching the tithe!* Someone has said, “When God controls all our money we can live better on the nine-tenths left after the tithe than we could on the whole amount before we tithed.”

I’m thinking of a man in one church I served, a wonderful Christian man in his late 60’s, early 70’s. He was retired, and getting a little pension from a small machine shop where he had been employed. When we had a stewardship emphasis in the church, he said, “I can’t give much, but I’ll try to help the church in other ways.” I just kept quiet. Not long after that, the congregation went through some difficulties where there was a division in congregation. A few who were upset cut back in their giving (as sometimes happens!). We had a budget presentation, and were honest in saying that the finances in the church were getting tight. This man and his wife were there as we presented the need. Several days passed. Then I saw him, and he mentioned that he and his wife had decided to try tithing as way of dedicating themselves to the Lord and standing by the church in a hard time. They stepped out on faith. A year or so later, he told me that things were going OK. They hadn’t really missed the money they gave away! My reading of the Bible, and my experience in life, is that we can never outgive God!

We’re looking at what Bible says about giving. ***The Bible also says that we should give sacrificially.*** One of the most thrilling stories in the Bible about giving is the record of the churches in Macedonia. They were poverty stricken and suffering much. Yet they *begged* the Apostle Paul for the chance to give in order to help others and get the gospel into the world.

“We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us” (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Notice, they gave according to their means, *and beyond their means!* The key, I think, is shown in verse 5: first they gave themselves to the Lord (vs. 5).

*Real giving always involves sacrifice.* How many of us are giving to the point where it represents a sacrifice? Are there any of us doing without things in order to give more to the Lord’s work? A lot of people in churches are giving as though it’s still 1950 or 1980. What do I mean? It’s like we’re still living in the day when if there was a special offering, you would put a dollar in the plate. Or, a person may think if they give \$20 to the church, that this will go far. How much does \$20 get you in today’s economy? Usually it won’t fill up our gas tanks. It’s hard to get a meal for 2 at a nice restaurant for \$20. (I know, Applebee’s has that 2 for \$20 deal, but remember you have to pay the tip and tax). How far will \$20 or \$40 go in the grocery store? Yet, some people think if you put \$20 or \$40 in the offering plate it somehow goes further because it’s the church. Like Jesus multiplies what we give like He did with the loaves and fish!

*So, Christian giving should stretch us. It should represent a sacrifice!* We did a capital fund drive in one of the churches I served, and the theme for it was: “Not equal giving, but equal sacrifice.”

***Summing it up, the Bible says we are to give willingly, cheerfully, regularly, proportionately, and sacrificially.*** Sometimes might ask: “Must all my giving to the Lord have to go to the local church? If I give to the United Way or the Cancer Society, should this be included in the tithe?” I believe so. Supporting a child through World Vision, helping a family in financial need, giving to a ministry beyond the local church, is part of our giving to the Lord’s work. Each of us must decide how much to give to this church, how much we value this church’s place in our life, and how committed we are to what we are doing here.

If you are a member of Community church or are active in the church you will be receiving a letter asking you to consider what you are willing to give for the coming year. I believe it’s part of my job *as your pastor* to help us develop good stewardship habits and a generous spirit as a congregation. I also believe it is the responsibility of our *church leaders* to have a vision for the future and to enlist the congregation to support those dreams!

Several years ago there was an article in the Faith and Values section of the Lancaster paper which highlighted how churches tended to emphasize giving at that time, and what effect the economy was having on people’s giving. Some pastors in the Lancaster area were interviewed and quoted in the article. One, a U.C.C. pastor (whose name or church I won’t mention) said that their church was having to dip into their endowments. “Twenty years ago, we wouldn’t dare depend on endowment,” the pastor said. He went on to say that their church doesn’t ask people

to tithe.” A pastor could get tarred and feathered” for that, this pastor says. I thought, “Duh! Maybe that has something to do with why they need to dip into their endowment!”

I’ve seen some exciting things happen in churches over the years as people have begun to tithe and step up their giving! I have witnessed great stories of how God has provided as people have given sacrificially and trusted God to provide their needs!

Let me close with a story: I was at a meeting where a few of the town’s pastors got together. The one, a Baptist pastor, told of knowing a family that needed \$31 more to meet their monthly rent payment. The Lord seemed to be telling my pastor friend, Marty, to give them the \$31. He opened his wallet, and it had exactly \$31 in it. Payday was a few days away for Marty, and his wife reminded him that they needed some groceries. But he took a leap of faith and gave \$31 to this family. The next day, “unexpectedly” he got a refund in the mail from an insurance policy premium adjustment. *Guess how much the refund was for?* You got it: \$31.

Coincidence? No. That’s the kind of God we have. He loves to meet our needs when we are generous in our giving!

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November 12, 2017*

