

Life In A Whole New Light
Why Are We Talking About This?

Three boys were in the school yard bragging about their fathers. The first boy said, “My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper; he calls it a poem; they give him \$50.”

The second boy said, “That’s nothing. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper. He calls it a song; they give him \$100.”

The third boy spoke up, “I’ve got you both beat. My Dad scribbles a few words on a piece of paper. He calls it a sermon, and it takes eight people to collect all the money!”

Today, I’m going to talk about something near and dear to all of us – MONEY! In particular, we are going to explore the subject of “Giving.” The very mention of that word conjures up all kinds of images and stereotypes. Some of you have perhaps been in a church where you felt beaten up or manipulated through guilt when it comes to giving.

Story of the man with the lemon – Treasurer in the local Baptist church

The title of this message is: “Why Are We Talking About This?” Some would say that in the culturally-sensitive church today, we shouldn’t talk about money, don’t ask for money, don’t preach about money. You just turn people off. Many people in church would rather hear a sermon about anything but money and giving.

In a church in the Deep South the preacher was moving toward the end of his sermon, and with a growing crescendo he said, “This church, like a crippled man, has got to get up and walk.” And the congregation responded, “That’s right, reverend, let it walk.”

The minister added, “This church, like Elijah on Mount Carmel, has got to run.” “Run, let it run, preacher. Let it run.” “This church has got to mount up on wings like eagles and fly.” “Let it fly, preacher. Let it fly.”

Then he added, “Now if this church is gonna fly, it’s gonna take money.” “Let it walk, preacher. Let it walk. Let it walk.”

So, am I just going where only fools dare tread? Actually, there are two main reasons I am going to talk about giving.

1) The Bible has a lot to say about money. Did you know that the Bible contains more than 500 references to prayer and almost 500 references to faith, but there are more than 2,000 references to money and possessions? Out of the 38 parables that Jesus told recorded in the Gospels, 16 deal with how we handle our money. Jesus said more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell combined. One out of every thirteen verses in the Gospels – 288 of them – deals with money or possessions.

2) It is for your spiritual benefit and growth that I do talk about money – and about giving. More said about this later. I share the perspective of Chuck Swindoll when he writes:

God has given us three ways on this earth to invest in eternity. Two of them are up for discussion and we approach them with open-mindedness, we can never seem to hear enough about them, but the third seems to be nobody else's business.

The preacher who fails to address *time* and how we spend it is considered derelict in his duty. For time is one of those irretrievable values in life you can only spend once and never capture again.

The pastor who overlooks teaching on *talents* and gifts that help the church body function smoothly and well and even efficiently is not doing his job. The congregation has a right to feel slighted because that subject is not mentioned.

But let the man address the subject of *treasure* and he's back on that age-old subject and just trying to get our money. I find that not only amazing but ridiculous.

Here's what I want to do this morning – answer three questions: Why should we give? How should we give? and How much should we give?

Before we jump in, let me mention two really important words that we need to keep before us this morning. The first is "Grace." The second is: "Responsibility." As you will see, these two truths have to be held simultaneously – in balance and in tension. Both are true; both are necessary perspectives if we are to have a biblical understanding of "giving."

I. Why Should We Give? Let me suggest four reasons.

A. It demonstrates our orientation to God's ownership.

Look what David writes in Psalm 24:

The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.
– *Psalm 24:1*

God is the owner – the owner of everything we are and everything we have. He is the one who has given you the ability to make wealth. This truth requires a perspective adjustment. We have to transition from that of a child to that of an adult. What's a child's perspective on everything? "Mine, mine, mine. It's all mine."

If we really embrace this biblical perspective, the question isn't really "How much do I give God?" It's rather: "How much do I keep for myself?" Two very different perspectives.

So, what is the consequence of that to us? That's the next thing we see about why we should give.

B. It demonstrates our stewardship of God's supply.

We are stewards. The Greek word in the New Testament for "steward" is *oikonomos*. This is where we get our English word "economist." God has entrusted to us life, possessions, talents, etc. It is our job then to manage those things which he has given us. With stewardship comes responsibility. This is Paul's point when he writes:

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.
– *1 Corinthians 4:2*

How do you handle those things that God has supplied? What kind of a manager, steward, are you? Someone has said:

Some people's finances are in such a mess they must be getting advice from the government.

C. It demonstrates our gratitude for God's goodness.

God gives to us because he is good and wants to bless us. James writes:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. – *James 1:17*

God delights in blessing his children – not only spiritually, though that primarily, but also materially. And he has given everything to us for our use and our enjoyment. Look what Paul teaches in his first letter to Timothy:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. – *1 Timothy 4:4-5*

We really do a disservice to the teaching of Scripture if our perspective is that “money is the root of all evil.” That’s not what it teaches. Look what the Scriptures actually say:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. – *1 Timothy 6:10*

Paul goes on in that chapter with this instruction to Timothy:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. – *1 Timothy 6:17*

D. It demonstrates our faith in God’s faithfulness.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns his disciples about being worry warts about the physical needs of life: food, drink, and clothing. He says, “Listen, don’t you know that you are valued by your Heavenly Father. He will care for you.” Then he says,

For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. – *Matthew 6:32*

There is a wonderful promise in Philippians, chapter four, that is most often taken out of context and used in all kinds of ways. Turn over there in your Bible please. I think most of you will find this verse familiar:

Philippians 4:19

The New Living Translation puts it like this:

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Now, there are many ways we can apply this to our lives. But I want you to see the interpretation of this verse when considered within its biblical context. Paul is thanking the church of Philippi for sending him a financial gift. He mentions that this wasn't the first gift he had received from them. But Paul noted that for a time they had been unable to help him.

Yet now, it seems, God had provided the resources for the church to share them with Paul. And Paul says to these generous Christians:

Philippians 4:18-19

Paul says it begins with a heart to give; then God will supply all your needs. We need to understand that this isn't the prosperity gospel. It isn't – “give money and God is obligated to bless you by making you healthy and wealthy.” It is simply noting that God will meet our needs, and in particular, he will provide for us so that we can give to help others.

So, why do we give?

1. To demonstrate our orientation to God's ownership.
2. To demonstrate our stewardship of God's supply.
3. To demonstrate our gratitude for God's goodness.
4. To demonstrate our faith in God's faithfulness.

So, how do American Christians measure up to these four statements as demonstrated in their giving? By all indicators, not very well. We really need biblical teaching in the church on this important subject.

II. How Should We Give?

Turn to First Corinthians, chapter 16

The church at Corinth had made a financial pledge to help the church in Jerusalem that was suffering because of a famine. And so Paul, in this letter to the church, gives them some instructions.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

A. Regularly – So the people were to give regularly. Paul suggests weekly here. But I don't think that is the only way to give regularly. Some of you give bi-monthly, others monthly. The point is to develop the discipline of giving, the habit of giving.

It means to regularly, consistently, honor God by giving a portion back to him out of the means he has given to you. Now, turn over to the book of Second Corinthians, chapter 9. We see that we are not only to give regularly, but also purposefully.

B. Purposefully – **2 Corinthians 9:7a**

Giving should not just be haphazard; it shouldn't just be "spur of the moment." That's when you are susceptible to manipulation. Reminds me of the story of the minister talking with the organist. He told her about his intent to really challenge the people to step out in faith and give substantially more than they were giving. He said to her, "When I get to the point where I ask that every person who is willing to commit to this to stand up, start playing *The Star-Spangled Banner*."

Give purposefully. When you do that, you will more likely give for the right reasons. The third way you should give is:

C. Cheerfully – **2 Corinthians 9:7**

You have heard it said that the Greek word for "cheerful" means literally "hilarious." God loves a hilarious giver. This person really puts his/her heart into it. In chapter eight, Paul uses the Macedonians as examples of this type of person.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

I can't wait for the day when someone comes up to me and begs earnestly for the favor of giving to Knollwood!

D. Responsibly – We are to be responsible givers.

Watch out for some things that are out there in the Christian world.

1. Manipulation by guilt – lots of people only give when they are "guilted" into it. Shame on any person who uses this to get people to give. Do you think God honors that kind of asking? Do you think God really honors that kind of giving?

We see people manipulated to give beyond their means. “Make a vow,” some preach, “even if you don’t have it. Put it on your credit card. Write that check even if it will clean out your bank account.”

2. Empty promises – this is the ploy of so many television preachers. “Send me a gift of a thousand bucks and I will pray for you and God WILL bless you. You will become rich; you can drive a Mercedes just like I do and live in a multi-million dollar mansion just like I do.” Or, “Send money and I will send you this vial of holy water from the River Jordan that will heal you of every affliction.” No wonder they’re short of water in Israel!

3. Legalism – I gave my 10%; shouldn’t God be satisfied. Does this sound more like a steward or an owner? Remember, it all belongs to God.

4. Being irresponsible in caring for yourself and your family

There’s even a danger, often because of manipulation, of giving TOO much – taking away one’s ability to provide for one’s family. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul talked about how we are to care for and provide for those around us. He said:

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

– *1 Timothy 5:8*

How should we give? Give regularly; give purposefully; give cheerfully; give responsibly.

Now – drum roll please:

III. How Much Should We Give?

We have to distinguish between the teaching and principle of Old Testament giving versus that in the New Testament. It is essentially “Law vs. Grace.” In the Old Testament, the tithe – 10 percent – was basically a tax on Jews to support the Temple and the Levitical priests who ministered in the Temple. This tithe or tax was not optional; it was required.

Remember that when the land was divided among the tribes of Israel, those from the tribe of Levi – who had been set aside as the priestly class, were given no land. They were to live by what was given and sacrificed at the Temple.

In addition, the Jews were required to give other offerings – perhaps what ultimately totaled about 22 percent of their income. So, for those who want to imitate Old Testament giving, you can't just settle for the tithe – 10 percent. You've got to go a lot further.

The New Testament doesn't clearly teach a parallel to the OT tithe. It seems to focus instead on "grace giving." Remember, God is the owner of it all; you are the steward. God expects you to manage it well, including giving a portion back for his use.

I don't have a problem with people thinking of 10 percent as a baseline for their giving to the Lord and his work. For some of you, 10 percent might be very difficult given your situation. But that is a decision you must make before God.

For others of you, ten percent shouldn't even be the starting place. God has richly blessed you. As the Scriptures teach: "To whom much is given, much is required."

Grace giving is in the heart of the believer who seriously seeks God's leading on how much they should give. You see, God isn't counting the money to see if it meets some percentage. He is more interested in motive. The key in grace giving is not "amount" but "attitude." It is not a matter of "how much" but rather "why."

We need to be clear here – God doesn't need your money as if he is somehow deficient without it or dependent upon it. He wants you!

There are times and situations when true sacrifice is appropriate. But sacrifice is never giving what you don't have to give. It is based upon giving up something I might have purchased in order to give to meet some particular need.

Some Concluding Thoughts:

Giving:

1. Benefits YOU When you give, you spiritually benefit. It is a part of your spiritual journey of growth towards maturity. It is also an indicator of spiritual growth. This message series is about indicators or markers of our spiritual growth. If you are growing spiritually, you will have a deepening assurance of your salvation; you will increasingly know God's forgiveness in your daily life; you will more consistently yield your life to the Holy Spirit each day. Last week, Chris talked about being involved in communication: God speaking to you in his Word and you speaking to him in prayer. These spiritual disciplines will increasingly mark your life.

The same is true about giving. I say this with all sincerity: if you are a growing Christian, you will be a giving Christian. Now, it is possible to be giving without growing, but it is not possible for you to be growing without giving.

You benefit from giving. Let's go back to Paul's letter to the Philippians. He says to them about their gift:

Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. – *Philippians 4:16-17*

2. Benefits OTHERS Others are blessed when you give. Look at Paul's teaching:

And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.... For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result in this ministry of giving – the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. – 2 *Corinthians 9:8-12*

3. Benefits GOD How does giving benefit God? Giving is an act of worship that brings glory to God. Look what Paul tells the Corinthians:

By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others. – 2 *Corinthians 9:13*

This is why I usually make the comment each Sunday morning that we “worship through our giving.” It is not just a necessary ritual we do each week. It is not just an add-on to the important stuff – like the sermon. It's not the unspiritual thing that we add to singing and prayer. It is a vital, crucial, central part of our worship.

Therefore:

1. Be Responsible There's that word: responsibility. Be a good steward, a wise manager of those things God has entrusted to you.

2. Be Content Part of being a good steward is being content with what God has given you. The writer of Hebrews ties contentment to God's faithfulness and his promises. Look at this:

Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." – *Hebrews 13:5*

3. Be Generous Remember Paul's warning in his letter to Timothy to the rich to be careful about putting their trust and confidence in their wealth? He goes on to say:

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. – *1 Timothy 6:18-19*

Grace – Responsibility: these two truths need to govern our thinking and our actions concerning the subject of giving. Grace giving with the responsibility of stewardship should be very freeing in our spiritual experience.