

### Intro | God gave...so we give

Though this is called the season of giving, it is probably better described as the season of spending. **And in the most tragic irony of all, many people will spend MORE money this month than they gave all year in the name of the Savior it celebrates.** In our three years as a church, we've had one sermon on money. This is not a sermon about money—though if sermons on money make you uncomfortable, you should ask yourself why. This sermon is not titled TITHE or LEGACY because this is not a sermon designed to make up a budget deficit or launch a building campaign. This is a simple word to help disciples of Jesus consider how, what, and why you GIVE in response to a God who GAVE.

Jesus talked about giving more than just around His birthday. Numbers range from 15 up to 50 percent of all that Jesus spoke about concerned money and/or possessions—most of which are warnings. People disagree whether this amounts to 800 or well over 2,000 verses in the N.T. Depending on whose calculation you accept, that can amount to almost a 1/3 of Jesus teaching or one verse about money/possession for every seven verses in the first three gospels. Without question, our Lord Jesus knew there was a fundamental connection between one's spiritual's life and one's attitude toward money. It is one of our most powerful idols evidenced by how easily we welcome others to inquire, even admonish us, about spiritual things—but don't you dare talk about “earthly things” how I spend my money (ask someone if your greedy). **Seeing as Jesus was crucified for what he taught, it shouldn't surprise anyone that pastors, or disciples with the courage to speak up, will be despised for repeating what Jesus said.**

By the time we are done, it is my hope that we will hold to the biblical conviction that **ALL of our stuff is God's**; that **ALL of our life is spiritual**; and that **ALL of our behavior**, even spending money, is governed by gratitude that comes from good theology. Good giving does not begin with good people—there are none. Good giving begins with good theology. And good theology not only reveals a GOOD GRACIOUS GOD who GIVES, but also a God who gave in specific ways to motivate and guide us in how we give.

### God the first giver

Good giving begins with good theology. Theology is the study of who God has revealed himself to be. Beginning in Genesis, God is revealed as **the first giver. He created everything out of nothing; He created everything there is to give.** And the world God created was full of good gifts. He created ALL of it display His greatness; and he GAVE it to Adam and Eve to both manage and enjoy. The Bible says that EVERY good gift comes from God the Father (James 1.17). God gave more than mountains, plants, and animals. God gave us more than breath; He gave us minds, He gave us strength, He gave us the tools to build life. Many believe that success comes solely from the hard work they perform or the wisdom they exercise. But the Bible teaches it is delusional to believe that anything we have is ours or that it came through our own efforts. **Did your success come from education?** God gave you your mind, the ability to learn, the capacity to grow, the desires to understand. **Did it come from strength or skill?** God gave you your muscles, your fingers, toes, abilities to walk and lift. **Did it come from your creativity or artistry?** God gave you the eye for art, the mind to imagine, the ability to dance or play instruments? **Did it come from your heredity or fate?** God gave you the family you have, the personality you were born with, even ordained the experiences you've had. **This truth should inspire us with deep gratitude.**

### Men were the first takers

God intended for his children—made in his image—to give like Him as they depended on Him as their **Father.** His design for the world was not to hoard or depend on the stuff he had given man. But something

happened that led to just that—the fall of man. Our first parents declared their independence from God by choosing to believe the false promise of sin which said—**you will be happier, stronger, and better with this.** . The fall of men began with lies about God and false promises about the stuff God had made: **Look at this thing you don't have...take it...it will make you happier.** This should sound familiar because it is the lie most of people fall for—and not just during the “Season of spending”. The serpent, called the father of lies, convinced our first parents that what they had (everything except one tree) was not enough. **They needed more.**

Romans 1 tells us that we have a gratitude problem: **<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Most men refuse to give thanks to God because they don't recognize God as the owner of all things.** They refuse to serve or honor God with the stuff they have been given and, instead, use it to honor themselves. It could be said that gratitude is the root of most problems. The reason we don't give our love, the reason we don't give patience, the reason we don't give forgiveness, the reason we don't give to those in need, is that we fail to understand how God has given to us. **Our generosity is directly related to our gratitude, and our gratitude is directly related to the gospel.**

### **God gives because he loves**

This is why I say that right giving begins with right theology. As image bearers of God, we are commanded and empowered give like God. Unlike God, when we give we give out of fear, guilt, or duty all while ensuring our giving doesn't really hurt us. **But that is not why and how God gave.** We must never forget that our triune God is holy and perfect in every way imaginable. Creation does not complete him, he is complete without us. He needs nothing. So...God does not give out of guilt, fear, obligation, or in effort to obtain something that he doesn't already have. Apart from any external motivation God CHOOSES to give to those who are undeserving, ungrateful, and ungodly in way that is intentional, proportional, sacrificial, and cheerful. In other words, he plans to give. He gives proportional to what he has—His Son. More than that, he gives His Son to die on a cross, and does so with Joy. His giving proclaims that he is, by nature, **perfectly loving.**

The Bible teaches that God IS love (1 John 4.16). **What does it mean to say GOD IS LOVE?** Unlike the love of men, the LOVE of GOD, is infinitely (lit.) more than a sentimental feeling, active affection, or even faithful commitment. **Theologically, God's Love means that God eternally gives of himself to others. This definition understands love as self-giving for the benefit of others** (Taken from Grudem). Giving and love go together. When we behold the clearest expression of this attribute of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we will be overwhelmed with gratitude that will overflow into generous giving.

Our giving to God, therefore, is intimately connected with the love God has for us. **Trying convince someone that they should give is like trying to convince someone that they should love.** Before we know the love of God, we will not give. **But when we experience the love of God, the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, the blessing of God in Christ, EVERYTHING changes.** The love of Jesus transforms why we give, what we give, and even to whom we give becomes driven by the love of Jesus, a love for Jesus, a love like Jesus, and a love to be with Jesus.

### **#1 Our giving is motivated by the love OF Jesus. 2Corinthians 5.14-15**

**<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.** **Our giving is motivated by the love OF Jesus.** When we put our

faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, then the love OF Christ begins to control us. There is a difference between believing Jesus and following Jesus. Anyone can respect or admire Jesus—even demons do. Following Jesus means the governing force in your life is the love Jesus has for you. It holds you, restrains you, compels you, and holds your life together. Our desire to give, therefore, is generated by the love of Jesus in us. And if the desire to give is not there, then it is because the love of SELF controls you. Jesus died and, when you believe that sinless Jesus died the death your sins deserved, the self-centered, self-absorbed, self-reliant, self-glorifying person that was your old life DIES with him. And then through faith, you rise with Jesus from the dead a new person devoted to no longer living for yourself, but for Jesus who loves you. We give because we are compelled to give. **Our giving is motivated by the love of Jesus.**

## **#2 Giving is motivated by a love FOR Jesus. – Philippians 3.6-8**

<sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. **Our giving is motivated by a love FOR Jesus.** Once we accept Jesus love, we see the world entirely differently. As they hymn, “TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS” says: *As we turn our eyes upon Jesus, as we look full in his wonderful face, the THINGS of this earth grow strangely dim.* Before Christ, we didn’t give because we were afraid of losing everything. But, our hearts are changed and now we do all things out of a LOVE for Jesus. It is refreshing to see new believers in Christ in the same way that it is refreshing to see new love in couples. I remember when Caylin and I were first dating. I didn’t have to think about being Romantic. In fact, I suffered the loss of many things so that I could gain Caylin—the loss of money, loss of sleep, loss of gas, loss of friendship. Rubbish. I willingly gave up anything because everything paled in comparison to getting THIS girl. Have you ever felt like that about Jesus? **Our giving is motivated by the love FOR Jesus.**

## **#3 Giving is motivated by a love LIKE Jesus – John 13.34-35**

<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” **Our giving is motivated by a love for the people of Jesus.** Jesus gave this command on the night he was betrayed and arrested. At what was to be the last dinner with his disciples, the God-man, the creator of all things, Jesus Christ began by washing to feet of his disciples. He humbled himself, washing the feet of men he had chosen, men he had taught, men he had created, giving his service to show us what love looked like. And then, he instructs his disciples to love one another the same way. In fact, he says that the distinguishing characteristic of his disciples will be a love for one another—the people of God, the church. We DO NOT give our time, money, or stuff because it is *sinful* to have or enjoy our time, money, or stuff. Jesus is not some eternal masochist who doesn’t want us to enjoy the good gifts he has given us. WE GIVE because, as disciples, we are overwhelmed with a love for others. Our desire to enjoy is trumped by our desire to bless—so much so we plan for it. We give not because we want to go without, but because we don’t want others to go without.. Having been given the mind of Christ, consider others more needy, more deserving, more important than ourselves. **Our giving is motivated to love like Jesus.**

## **#4 Giving is motivated by a love WITH Jesus. – Philippians 3.17-21**

Finally, in writing about those who have gone after the world Paul writes: <sup>5</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Finally, our giving

is motivated by a love of being with Jesus. Not only is our view of the stuff in this world changed, our view of the nature of our living in this world entirely is changed. We must never forget that this is not our home.

**This should impact how we give.** I believe John Piper says it best: *“IF we are refugees and exiles on earth (1Peter 2.11), and if our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3.20), and if nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8.35), and if his steadfast love is better than life (Psalm 63.3), and if all hardship is working for us an eternal weight of glory (2Cor 4.17)...THEN...Then we will give to the winds our fears and “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6.33). We will count everything as rubbish in comparison with Christ (Philippians 3.7-8). We will ‘joyfully accept the plundering of our property; for the sake of unpopular acts of mercy (Hebrews 10.34). We will choose “rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin,” and we will count “the reproach of Christ great wealth than the treasures of Egypt.”* If we LIVE with an eternal perspective, we will GIVE with an eternal perspective. **Our giving is motivated by a love of being with Jesus.**

**Conclusion:** 1 John 4.19 *We love because he first loved us.* (We give because he first gave to us). The question is not WHAT is your treasure, but WHO. Your heart will follow your treasure...and your wallet will follow your heart. **Many will ask...what is generous? Do we even realize how “poor” Jesus became?** He was not poor because he came as a carpenter, or lived as a peasant for most of his life. He was poor because he was the infinite God becoming man. *Philippians 2.5-8* ***5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** He emptied himself of it all. And in giving grace, mercy, love, forgiveness generously, he reveals that true nature of generous giving. Generous giving is sacrificial giving—we deny ourselves, we ignore the world’s view of success, we find security in God, we give so much it hurts, that others might be blessed.

We give out of response to how much God has loved and given us—for the fact that while I had NOTHING to give to him, Christ gave His life. He gave so we give. **If your giving does not cause you to change your lifestyle, then it is not generous.**

Know that, even if we were not meeting budget or need to raise money for some ministry, the prayer of our elders would not be that you would give more or spend less. Quite simply, our prayer would be that you would know the love of Jesus Christ. Only then will your giving will be driven by the love of Jesus, a love for Jesus, and a love like Jesus as you wait to be with Him. We will close with the prayer of the Apostle Paul : ***14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.***