

The theme of our 40 days of Money series is "What should we do with God's money?" We are answering that question in five ways (Understand it, Earn it, Spend it, Give it, Teach it). Today we will be talking about giving God's money. You could ask the question "Why talk about giving?" Isn't that one of the most contentious, personal, and anger producing issues in the church today? Aren't churches accused of being after people's money? There are many people who don't like being asked about their spending habits, and giving habits are even more off limits.

Before I give you some reasons why I am preaching this sermon, let me give you three reasons that did not factor into what is being said today:

First, I am not preaching on giving because God needs your money. Besides the fact (as I shared in our first sermon) that it's all God's money in the first place, God does not need you to give any of it back to Him. God is not a needy God. The Bible tells us clearly in Acts 17:24-25 that God doesn't need anything from people: "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." God doesn't need our money, since He owns everything anyways.

Psalm 50:10-12 is just one more of many biblical texts that states God's ownership of the world: "every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." So it isn't like God is saying, "Man, if the pastor doesn't nail that sermon today, and people at the church don't start giving more, boy, I don't know what I am going to do! I had these plans, great things I was going to do, but if he can't pull it off today, I am just sunk." God is sovereign, He is in control, and His bank account is full, even without your \$5, \$50, \$500, or \$5000.

Second, I am not preaching on giving because our church is short on funds. Last year we had over a \$30,000 surplus here at church, and our giving for the first two months of the year exceeded our budget. There are churches in this district who really struggle financially, making them unwilling to do a community-wide service because they can't afford to miss an offering, and causing them to rethink whether they can afford a pastor. By God's grace and mercy and the generosity of you His people, we are not one of those churches.

Third, I am not preaching on giving because I want you to be rich. The prosperity gospel that is rampant in many Christian circles and on TV teaches that the goal of giving is getting. Prosperity gospel says the more you give to God, the more He gives back to you; just have faith, believe, and give to this ministry and all your financial problems will be solved. This is not true at all. Just look at the life of the Apostle Paul. He was saved by Jesus, he worked hard his whole life serving Jesus, he gave generously of his time and supported himself, and what did he get for his troubles? Beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, and jail time. If you do a better job of giving back to God after today, it doesn't come with a guarantee that life goes good.

So why preach on giving?

1. We need to be educated on what the Bible says.

The Bible says lots about money and giving, and we need to know what it says. In today's biblically illiterate world, I don't want to assume you know what the Bible says on giving. Some of you may have not heard of tithing. I know many of you have questions on tithing, especially as it pertains to the New Testament. You may have questions like: Who should I tithe to? Do I tithe before or after taxes? The Bible does give us guidelines for our giving. The longer we get it wrong, the harder it is to change.

2. Some of you deserve a hug.

There are great givers here at this church. We did a Giving Sunday back in October, gathered some facts about how much people in this church gave outside of the church, and found that there was almost a quarter million given by people in this church – amazing. So for those of you who have by God's grace understood how God wants you to give His money, and do give, generously and sacrificially, I pray that you are encouraged this morning (not proud) but grateful for God's mercy to you.

3. Some of you need a kick in the pants.

The reality is that some of you don't give. You are hoarding, wasting, or foolishly spending the money God has given you to manage – that is a sin. I am praying that sin stops after today. Giving is a soul matter, and I care about your souls. Yes, it is my job, but you are also my friends. God's judgment is coming, and I want you to be ready.

4. So you can have joy.

Giving away money that could have been spent on me brings joy? Yes it does. When we obey God, do what is right, and live as He called us to live, we can have joy. We can be joyful in supporting the church and knowing that people are hearing the gospel, being saved from hell, and living transformed lives. There is joy in giving from our abundant excess so others can eat for a day. And there is joy in the realization that you aren't being consumed by money and possessions, but rather consumed by a love of Christ.

So let's learn about giving God's money.

1. Tithing is a good place to start when obeying God's command to give.

The concept of tithing comes from God's law in the Old Testament. We read about it in **Leviticus 27:30** – *“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.”* The word tithe means ten percent. If you make \$4000 a month, and put \$100 in the offering plate once, that isn't tithing. If your allowance is \$10 a month, and you give \$1, you are giving God a tithe of your money.

In the Old Testament law, there were numerous tithes. The first went to the Levites – the priests of Israel, whose job was to serve at the tabernacle of God. Since they weren't making money otherwise, the rest of the Israelites were to tithe to the Lord to provide for their material needs. However, the Israelites were also to tithe for certain festivals, give generously to the poor, and give other offerings as well. In total, God's people, if obedient, were giving above 25 percent of their gross incomes away, and according to Blomberg, the godly Jews in Jesus' day who lived in a foreign country could be giving up to 50 percent of their incomes away (Blomberg 17).

What do you think God called people who failed to give ten percent of their income to the work of the Lord? **He called them robbers. Malachi 3:8-10** – *“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to*

the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

If God’s people were being greedy and not giving as they should, God said flat out that they were robbing Him. Stealing isn’t a good idea, but stealing from God? Pretty much a disaster. The sins of materialism, mistreating the poor, and basic social injustice were just as prevalent in the Old Testament as they are today, and God denounced those sins and challenged His people be generous and love the poor then as He does now. The Old Testament prophets knew that failure to give was not a sign of material poverty but of spiritual poverty, and they challenged God’s people to get right with God and to show that by their giving.

But what about the New Testament? In some circles today there is this big debate about whether tithing, giving ten percent of your income to the church (that is the equivalent of the storehouse in the Malachi passage), is still relevant now that Jesus has instituted a new covenant. In looking at the New Testament, we see that there are only three passages that actually mention the tithe (Matthew 23:23, Luke 18:12, and Hebrews 7:1-10), and only Matthew 23:23 even remotely applies to the discussion of giving: *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”*

The Pharisees were taking their little seed packs, counting out nine for themselves, one for God, and feeling smug about it. This was a totally wrong attitude, and Jesus’ main focus was on their lack of love and mercy towards others; though he doesn’t say their tithing is wrong, which he easily could have (see D. A. Carson, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1999/november15/9td094.html>).

The rest of the New Testament is fairly silent on the whole idea of tithing – Paul never mentions it, nor does Peter or John. So where does that leave us?

We are a law driven people – it is part of our sinful nature. Give us a rule we can follow, and if we can follow it and make God happy, great. What happens in regards to tithing is twofold. Some of you might think, “Give ten percent to God? – no way! I have too much other stuff I need to spend my money on.” But others of you might have an equally false view and think of tithing like it’s a membership fee to God – “What do I need to give to God to make sure I am all paid up and good to go? Just tell me what I owe, and I will write the check and feel good. I will pay my bill, and then I can enjoy the rest of ‘my’ money.”

Please don’t look at the tithe that way. **The gospel tells us that it is only through Christ that we are saved, by grace**, not through giving a certain amount of money. Remember, *“The world and everything in it is Mine,” says God*” (Psalm 50:12). Christians know that God owns it all, and realize that giving a tithe of their money to God isn’t the ceiling of their giving, but a start. They strive to be generous, knowing that the issue isn’t dollars but devotion to God.

I did a little figuring, and based on 63 households in this church and an average income of \$52,000, if everyone in this church tithed (meaning gave ten percent) to the storehouse of the church, our yearly giving would be \$327,600. Clearly that isn’t happening. Should it? Do you go to hell if you don’t give ten percent? No. But I would still challenge you to do it. Personally, our family tithes. As I mentioned in the first sermon, my gross salary is \$52,329.00. Divide that by twelve, you get \$4360.75, and ten percent of that is \$436.07. Is that all we give? No, but that’s what we start with, and we go from there. As a Christian, I want to obey God, and likely you do too (otherwise, why would you be here?). “Giving is an act of obedience to God. Christians are obligated to give from what which they have been entrusted” (Jones 143).

2. God wants us to be generous, cheerful givers.

You may think, whether you tithe or not, that tithing is the main category of giving in the Bible. But it isn't, and that is a good thing. If you focus on this perceived requirement to give a certain amount, then if you did give it you could feel good about yourself, and if you didn't tithe, you might feel bad about yourself. Some people get in the rut of saying, "Ten percent goes to God, and the rest I can do whatever I want with," even if the rest is used wastefully or sinfully. Or, let's say you think ten percent is all God says you should give, and you give 13 percent. That might lead you to thinking you are "all that" and more because you are more generous than God requires.

Fixed percentages aren't really the issue – the issue is giving generously, even sacrificially, to God of all that you have. Christians are to be a cheerful, generous people: "*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share*" (1 Timothy 6:18). Paul also expresses this in 2 Corinthians 8-9. A bit of background for these passages: Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, which had its fair share of problems. To encourage them in the area of giving, specifically in giving to the Christians in Jerusalem who were really suffering, he tells them about other churches that are excelling at giving. And they are not doing well with giving because they are super rich or anything, but because of God's grace in their lives.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – "*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints – and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*"

So here you have an extremely poor group of people, joyfully giving, even begging to give. Because they had this love for God, they wanted to help; they even gave sacrificially more than Paul expected of them, and he was blown away by their generosity. Do you ever give beyond your means? Do you ever feel so drawn to give that you look at the money in your wallet and say, "I really need this, but they need it more"? No one forced this church to give, but they wanted to. They gave cheerfully and out of love for God, almost like they were fighting for the offering plate. And their giving affected them – they likely had to make lifestyle changes so they could give some of their money away. Have you ever given so much away that you had to make changes in your life, perhaps not eating out as much or cancelling a family vacation?

Paul continues to challenge the Corinthians in verses 9-12: "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.* **Jesus is our example in giving** – he gave everything so we could experience the riches that come from the forgiveness of sins. If we believe that truth and love that truth, it will be natural for us to ask, "I saw what he did for me, so what can I do to help others?" This is proof of the Holy Spirit living in us.

And you notice in verse 12 we give what we have. If you don't make a lot, giving ten percent is a stretch. But if you make a lot, and only give ten percent away, that doesn't say much. I know wealthy people who love Jesus and give away 90 percent of their money. If you received a \$100,000 check right now, what would you do? Give away ten percent? More?

Paul's words of encouragement continue in 9:6 – "**The point is this: whoever** sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." The law of farming is if you don't plant much, you won't reap much. Similarly, if you give lots, you will get lots – not in terms of money (though prosperity preachers would have you think that), but in bearing fruit for God's kingdom, or as it says in verse 11 – "you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way." Give to get the chance to give again.

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Does this mean you should only write a check when you are feeling happy? Well, if the fact that Jesus took the punishment for your sins upon himself on the cross, and gave you his perfect righteousness so you could stand before God forgiven and accepted on judgment day doesn't make you cheerful, I'm not sure what will. Remember, it is a matter of the heart.

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). God can change your heart, and He can provide what you need.

Giving is really a worship issue – it is a heart thing. Talk it out with Jesus and ask what he wants you to give. Do you think he will tell you "less than ten percent"? You are a steward, so what lifestyle adjustments does he want you to make? It is not about the percentage, but about the love of God.

As Blomberg writes, "There need be no fixed percentages of how much we spend and how much we give away when we are passionately consumed by the commitment to be good stewards of 100 percent of our material possessions" (54). I know there are people in this church who aim for 20 percent in giving. Are any of you shooting for 30 percent? Wouldn't that be great?

3. What now? Getting Practical.

Money is practical, so we have to get practical about how to apply what we have learned about it. We can't just say "God wants us to give, a tithe is ten percent, and it is important to be generous – got it." What can we do today, tomorrow, and this week as we seek to give God's money?

1. Congratulate yourself.

If you give generously and cheerfully, praise God! Be encouraged as you are being faithful with what God has given you. Share with others how you give – not to brag, but to give a testimony to God's grace in your life, and to help be an example to others.

2. Pray for God's grace.

If you are struggling with giving, you have to pray. God's grace and understanding what Jesus has done for you will help you change and be a generous giver. My words won't do it and guilt won't do it. Pray that God will reveal to you the truth that your giving is a sign of your love for Christ. If you call yourself a follower of Jesus and you don't give, you are not just being stingy – you might not be a follower of Jesus. I am praying that you will give because I want you to be saved. If you can't let go of your money, how will you be able to grab onto Jesus?

3. Stop lying to yourself.

Many of you are thinking right now, "I appreciate what you are saying; I like Jesus and appreciate the church, but I just can't give ten percent, not even close." For those of you who are thinking that, are you saying that if you gave ten percent you would die? That writing out the check will lead to a tingling in your shoulder that turns into a heart attack? None of you will die, and likely none of you will default on your bills or go bankrupt if

you tithed. Please stop lying to yourself. Admit to yourself and to God you would rather just spend the money on yourself.

Another lie people tell themselves to feel better is: “I will give more to God when I get in a better financial situation.” When will that happen? If you can’t give \$1 on \$10, or \$10 on \$100, you won’t give \$100 on a \$1000. If you use that lie, and you died tomorrow, would God look at your giving and be satisfied? We need to say sorry, stop sinning, and give.

4. Think long term.

The stock market has had a bad couple of weeks. If you talk to a financial advisor, he would tell you to think long term. God wants us to think long term – but not just 20 or 30 years ahead – but 200 or 2000 thousand years ahead. Giving doesn’t necessarily help you in this life; if you give money away, you are poorer. Will giving help you today? Maybe. Will it make you poorer? Yes! Will it bring you future joy for all eternity? Absolutely! As you give towards God’s kingdom, you will reap eternal rewards.

Do you think Christianity is something you will see all the benefits of right away? People who believe in the “health and wealth” gospel promise that Jesus will make your life better. This isn’t true. Jesus says those who follow him will suffer. That is the reality of the Christian life. But he also promises eternal blessings.

Personally, I can’t see the sense in giving away \$440 a month if this world is all there is. But Jesus tells me to store up treasures in heaven. The book of Revelation tells me there is a new world coming. That is where the blessings of giving come in. If you have been saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ, you can give joyfully now because of the future grace you will receive.

5. Make a plan.

Pastor Tim Keller writes that you need to plan what to do with your money. Give yourself a goal of giving, otherwise you will feel guilty about everything you buy. Giving takes work, it doesn’t just happen. And don’t forget community – you can talk about your goals with people you admire in your community. It is easy to keep giving private and only talk to ourselves about it, either being too hard on ourselves or too easy. Call someone.

6. God First.

Say a man serves pie to all the expenses in his life. He is about to eat the last piece when he notices one more person at the table: the One who brought the pie. – but then he eats the pie anyway, even though God brought him the pie in the first place.

What happens when you give your wife or kids only the leftovers of your money or time? They don’t like it and it hurts your relationship with them. Do you think it is any different with God? **It’s all God’s – it’s His money, after all. Let’s be generous givers.**

We can think of the story of Jericho as an example – the people crossing into the Promised Land gave the first and only city they had conquered to God, trusting in faith that He would give them more. Give to God first, trust Him, and He will supply. If you can’t willingly give yet, I know that the power of the Gospel can encourage you to. Giving and letting go is work of grace and the spirit, and you can be transformed (Colossians 3, Ephesians 4:22, Romans 8).

Works Cited

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