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CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH GIVING



When we came to the seminary for my pastoral studies, my wife and I were very poor as we paid full tuition and undergraduate loans. Of the three years we were there, we went out to eat once because my mother-in-law sent us a check to do so for our anniversary. Despite living in poverty, we decided to put God first and honor Him by being faithful in our tithe and offerings.

In the third year of seminary, at the end of one month, after paying many bills, there was nothing left over except money for tithe and offering. We struggled with the thought about taking the money to buy food, but we decided to give it as tithe.

We trusted in God and prayed about it. A few days later, we opened the mail and there was a check for \$200 from a friend as a gift for our wedding. The irony was that our wedding happened two and a half years earlier. He said in the letter, "I was thinking about you today, and I remembered I did not attend your wedding. I am very sorry. I was on a business trip, but I wanted to send you a gift." The date on the envelope matched the same day we prayed and decided to pay our tithe.

God is always faithful in taking care of our needs. He uses a variety of ways to care for us. At that time, God had made an impression upon our friend's heart precisely when we needed help most. "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).¹

In this article, I will lay out what the Bible teaches us about giving.

GIVING IS A SIGN OF OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD

When I visited the University of Chicago Museum a few years ago, I noticed that tithing was a common

practice in biblical times. It was a sign of lordship and allegiance. Abraham demonstrated his worship in returning his tithe to God (Gen. 14:17-21). This simple yet significant act of worship was a public acknowledgment of God's sovereign claim and ownership as well as His Lordship. Love and gratitude are expressed in a tangible way through tithe and offering. When Abraham gave out of the abundance God provided for him, God blessed him with fullness of life, prosperity, strength, and hope (Heb. 7:1-4).

GIVING IS ASSOCIATED WITH GOD'S BLESSING

The Bible instructs us to give out of a joyful heart. "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). When we give gladly, willingly, and cheerfully, we demonstrate an unselfish attitude. This attitude comes out of appreciation for what God has done for us by giving us new life and hope through Jesus Christ. God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving is the result of our obedience to God and our wholehearted trust in Him. It shows our willingness to share what we possess. "Jesus Christ must be Lord of all or not Lord at all; including, of course, our purse or wallet."²

Givers can be divided into three types: the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. Some givers are like a piece of flint--to get anything out of it you must hammer it, and even then you only get chips and sparks. No matter what the need is, or the appeal in church, nothing comes out of them. Others are like a sponge--to get anything out of a sponge, you must squeeze it and squeeze it hard, because the more you squeeze a sponge, the more you get. Therefore, the more skilled

the one who asks for the offering, or the more guilt he has woven into it, the more money he can get out of them. But others are like a honeycomb. They have experienced God's blessings, acceptance, and love. Thus, they overflow with generous giving. God is generous to us and that is how we should live. When we give in that kind of spirit, we are indeed showing our love for God.³

GIVING IS A CLEAR INDICATOR OF THE PRIORITIES OF OUR LIVES

Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21, ESV). What is our focus? Do we focus on earthly possessions or heavenly possessions?

Jesus is not against savings accounts. He is against our preoccupation with money and material things. Greed can cause us to be so preoccupied with secular pursuits that we forget why we are here. The more we give to God of our money and service, the more we show we are preoccupied with God and service to people.

Billy Graham once said, "Tell me what you think about money, and I can tell you what you think about God, for these two are closely related. A man's heart is closer to his wallet than almost anything else."⁴ Martin Luther also saw a connection between a man's heart and his wallet when he said, "There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook."⁵

GIVING IS AN INDICATOR OF OUR LEVEL OF TRUST IN GOD

Money is important to us. Giving it demonstrates a level of trust and obedience to God. The Psalmist declares, "Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord" (Ps. 4:5).

One day, Tim, a member of a church I pastored, confided in me about his trouble with the concept of tithing and giving. He revealed his doubts to me by saying, "Pastor, I just don't see how I can give 10 percent of my income to the Lord when I can't even keep on top of my bills." I said to him, "If I promise to make up the difference in your bills if you should fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?" After a moment thinking about it, he responded, "Sure, if you promise to make up any shortage, I guess I could try tithing for one month." "Now,

what do you think of that," I said. "You say you'd be willing to put your trust in a mere man like yourself, who possesses little materially, but you couldn't trust your Heavenly Father who owns the whole universe!" The next Sabbath, Tim gave his first tithe, and has been doing so faithfully ever since. Within two years after he paid that tithe, he was able to pay off all his debt and the Lord blessed him in his small business to the point where he was able to expand his business at least 2-3 times what it was originally. When we trust God and give Him everything, God will bless us (See Mal. 3:10)⁶.

Tim learned to live by the promise found in Matthew 6:31-33, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

A PERSONAL APPEAL

In 1815, the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon in the battle of Waterloo. The duke's most recent biographer claims to have an advantage over all the other previous biographers. His advantage was that he had found an old account ledger that showed how the duke had spent his money. That, says the biographer, was a far better clue to what the duke thought was really important than reading his letters or his speeches.

Can you imagine that? If someone wrote your biography on the basis of your checkbook, your income-tax return, your work, or your time, what might it say about you? What about your loyalties, focus, and whom you serve? What is more important to you, trusting God or your possessions? ED

¹ All Scripture is taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

² Riggs, Charlie. *Learning to Walk with God: Twelve Steps to Christian Growth*. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1990, 155.

³ Brooks, Ronald K. *A Flint, A Sponge or A Honeycomb: Discovering the Life of Faith*. Lima: Coss Publishing Company, 1995. P. 154.

⁴ Ibid. 154.

⁵ Crosswalk, *Money and Motives*. <https://www.crosswalk.com/fai-th/spiritual-life/money-and-motives-11581312.html>, accessed December 3, 2017.

⁶ Malachi 3:10 "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

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