

Giving to God First

Various Scriptures

1. When I was a little kid, I had a piggy bank. It was one of those kinds that you had to break open to get your money out. There wasn't a little hole in the bottom. I remember the day when it got full and you couldn't squeeze another penny or dollar bill in. I was so excited. I would get to break it open and get to all that money. I was going to be rich.

2. Before I broke it open, my mom and dad told me that I would need to take 10% and put it in the offering at church. At first, I was a little upset. It didn't seem fair. They talked to me about the importance of giving to God first, and guarding my heart against greed and the love of money.

3. So, I had a bright idea. If giving God 10% was a good thing to do, then giving God all of it would be wonderful. I don't know, maybe they told me the story of the poor widow who put her two mites in the collection box. If she could put all of her pennies in, then I could put all of my pennies in.

4. I had like \$20 in change. I told you I was rich. I put them in two Ziploc bags and I carried them to church as happy as I could. I was in Junior worship when the offering plate came by, and I remember poring all my money out of those bags, and the offering plate was full and weighed down by all those coins. I wanted to be sure God saw it all. Sure, it was childish, but it was a child like faith.

5. It was one of the best offering times I've ever had in church. Oh sure, there have been others. There was the time Teresa and I decided to take all of our entertainment budget for the entire month and give it to a need God placed on our hearts. That was pretty cool. I remember the time I got to take a poor teenager from the Mountain Mission School deep in the Appalachian mountains of Virginia to his first professional football game to see his favorite team play and make his dream come true.

6. I have a confession to make though. Most offerings aren't like that for me? Are they like that for you? How would things be different if they were?

7. We are in the middle of a series called Extreme Home Makeover. Last week we talked about money issues in our home. We talked about the importance of giving, but we were able to spend only a little time on it, and I wanted to focus a little more today.

8. God asks us to before we spend a dime or save a nickel, to give to him first. That flies in the face of our culture. Why would we do that? There was

a Christian family that found themselves in some financial trouble after one of them lost a job and they sought some professional help. The financial counselor looked through their finances, and they saw that they gave to the church every week. That was the first thing he told them to cut out. He explained that it was a completely optional expenditure and until they got their financial house in order, they needed to stop it. Thankfully, this couple was grounded in their faith and they said, "no." The giving stays. We can't expect God to bless us and honor us if we don't honor him. They did honor him, and God honored them. They got things in order and ended up in a much better place.

9. But why was their financial advisor wrong, and why were they right? Why should we give to God first?

I. Giving is an act of worship.

1. When we give, we often think in terms of helping someone. Our gift is going to meet a certain need. In terms of giving to the church, it's going to help the church. What does that mean? Well it helps us support ministries like the Campus House at Missouri State which gives students a church home away from home. It gives other students their first opportunity to hear the gospel, and many of these are International students. Spiritually speaking university is where the mission field comes to you. It also challenges a certain number of these students to go into the ministry themselves.

2. It enables us to meet needs in and around Marshfield. We regularly help people with gas, food, utilities, housing, and other needs. It helps us pay the bills around here and keep the lights on. It goes to pay my salary and Kelly's. Hopefully, we're worth every penny.

3. However, the ultimate recipient of your giving isn't the church, it isn't the ministries we support, it isn't the needy. It's God himself. In Philippians 4, Paul thanks the church for their generous support of his ministry. They had gotten together with taken up a collection and had sent it with a mutual friend, named Epaphroditus to help support Paul's ministry.

4. Paul writes to the Philippians and says, *"I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."*

5. He's saying when Epaphroditus arrived in Rome and laid before me the gift that you had sent with him, it was as if my physical needs were an altar, and your gifts were the sacrifice laid upon that altar. And because your gift

was rooted in true fellowship, because it was driven by the Gospel, because it was generous and sacrificial and came from a glad and willing heart—when Epaphroditus set those coins before me to meet my needs, a soothing aroma wafted into heaven. God smelled the sweet-smelling aroma of a spiritual sacrifice, and He smiled. He was pleased.

6. We think of worship as singing songs, or praying prayers, or maybe partaking of communion. But we need to see it as much more than that. Giving isn't a duty or an obligation. It is an act of worshipping God. It reflects and shows his glory.

7. When you give, you are recognizing God's worth above all things. You are declaring that God is worth more than anything else you might have spent that money on, that you love him more than any of those things. True Christian giving is a sacred and spiritual act of worship.

II. Giving Frees You From the Tyranny of Stuff.

1. Secondly, giving frees you from the tyranny of stuff. I want to begin this point with a video clip.

2. When will we realize we don't have money? We don't have stuff. It has us. Let me quote from Matt Walsh:

That's our entire economic system: buy things. Everybody buy. It doesn't matter what you buy. Just buy. It doesn't matter if you don't have money. Just buy. Our entire civilization now rests on the assumption that, no matter what else happens, we will all continue to buy lots and lots of things. Buy, buy, buy, buy, buy. And then buy a little more. Don't create, or produce, or discover — just buy. Never save, never invest, never cut back — just buy. Buy what you don't need with money you don't have. Buy when you're happy. Buy when you're sad. Buy when you're hungry. Buy when you want to lose weight. Buy an iPhone. Six months have passed, here, buy another iPhone. Go online and buy things. Go to the mall and buy things. On your way, stop and buy some more things. Buy things for every occasion. Buy things to celebrate. Buy things to mourn. Buy things to keep up with the trends. Buy things while you're buying things, and then buy a couple more things after you're done buying things. If you want it — buy it. If you don't want it — buy it. Don't make it — buy it. Don't grow it — buy it. Don't cultivate it — buy it. We need you to buy. We don't need you to be a human, we don't need you to be a citizen...we just need you to be a consumer, a buyer. If you are alive you must buy. Buy like you breathe, only more frequently.

Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:

¹⁹ *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

3. **You either have money, or it has you.** A couple of years ago The Wall Street Journal ran an article based on the latest scientific research trying to answer the age-old question, "Can money buy happiness?"ⁱ
4. The short answer was only for a short time. Certainly, those with a good income had a greater sense of well-being than those who were very poor, but they also found that this sense of satisfaction fell off above incomes of \$75,000 per year. In other words, those making millions of dollars didn't feel any happier than those with an upper middle class income.
5. They found that there was principle of diminishing returns at work. They called this process "hedonic adaptation," which basically means it's very hard to buy happiness through materialism. Buying that new dress and fancy car gives you a short term thrill, but you quickly adjust to the new reality, and take it for granted, so that your state of happiness quickly returns to where it was before the new purchase. So, you have to go out and purchase something new to get that thrill again. It's very addictive and very destructive.
6. According to the research there were two things we could do to combat this tendency. **1. The first was thanksgiving.** Show gratitude. Count your blessings. **2. Second, they said, was give it away.** Strange, sounds like I've heard those two things before somewhere.
7. The article states, "the paradox of money is that although earning more of it tends to enhance our well-being, we become happier by giving it away than by spending it on ourselves." A professor Dunn has run experiments in countries around the world that have found that people receive greater happiness when they give their money away, and that happiness lasts much longer.
8. Could it just be that Jesus knew what he was talking about? When you give, you throw off those shackles. You declare your independence. Not me. Not my life. Not my heart. Money is something I have. Money is something I use, but it doesn't have me.

III. Giving strengthens your faith in God's provision.

1. Thirdly, Giving strengthens your faith in God's provision. Why does God ask that we give to him first? Last week we looked at the biblical principle of first fruits. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, *"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."* (Proverbs 3:9-10)

2. The idea of first fruits was that you gave to God from the first part of the harvest. You never gave God the leftovers. Our giving should be right off the top. It's the first line item in the family budget. Does God say this because he's short of cash? Does he need our money? Is God being greedy?

3. No. We saw last week how it all belongs to him anyway. Ps. 24:1 *"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."* It's already his, and he could take it whenever he wants. So why does he ask that we give it, and that we do that before we do anything else with our money.

4. First, it's a recognition that it come from him to begin with. You might be thinking, "Wait a minute! I earned that. I worked hard for that." Who gave you the intelligence and the abilities to earn it? Where did you get the aptitude to develop those skills? Who taught you? Who trained you?

5. We have all benefited and have been blessed by the generosity of others. Even our own hard work is a gift of God. Giving simply reminds us that we are not completely self-made and self-sufficient. It reminds us that no man or woman is an island unto themselves. We have all received from beyond ourselves and we all need to give beyond ourselves. We have been blessed to be a blessing.

6. When we give we are saying I haven't gotten here all by myself and I can't do it all by myself. I need the goodness of God. I need the grace of God. I trust in the power of his provision.

IV. Giving reflects spiritual trustworthiness.

1. When we give, it proves that we can handle more. Jesus reveals a startling insight into the ways of God's kingdom in Luke 16:10-13.

"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

2. God gives you small treasures in hopes that he may be able to give you big treasures. Every time you receive, every pay day, every gift, every unexpected dollar that comes your way is a test. How are you going to handle it? How are you going to manage it? Are you going to use it wisely? Will you prove that you may be trusted with more? Maybe the reason we have so little is that God can't trust us with more, because we haven't shown the spiritual trustworthiness necessary.

How We Should Give

1. So, how should we give? Paul writes to the Corinthian church in 2 Cor. 9:6-7

⁶ *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* ⁷ *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. First, he wants you to give **generously**. This is the principle of sowing and reaping. What you sow with what God has already giving you will affect how much you reap from God in the future. There is a direct tie in the amount of blessing we receive to how much we trust God in our giving. Little trust; little blessing. Great trust; great blessing.

3. Too often we approach this from the wrong end. Instead of asking how much do I have to give, we need to ask how much do I get to give.

4. Second, we need to give **willingly**. Paul says we should give what we have decided in our heart. Giving needs to come from the heart. It's not done out of reluctance, or you feel like you have to.

5. Thirdly, we need to give **cheerfully**. I wish every offering time could be like that time when I was a kid. We need to give with an openhanded joy, excited to see what God might do with it, excited to see what blessings might come our way, excited to see how we might grow. I think in a perfect church in a perfect world, offering time might be the best part of the service, the part we all look forward to, and the part we were all sad when it was over.

6. It has been said there are three types of giving: grudge giving, duty giving, and thanksgiving. Grudge giving says, "I have to"; duty giving says, "I ought to"; thanksgiving says "I want to."

7. When offering time comes, do you give to God like you give to the IRS after an audit? Or do you give to God like you pay your bill to the electric

company? Do you know some people actually give to God like they give to their ecstatic four-year-old on Christmas morning or a young man gives an engagement ring to his beloved.

8. I wish every offering was like when I broke my piggy bank as a little kid. I'm not there yet, but I'm moving in that direction. I love those moments of joyous generosity.

9. Imagine if in a few moments at offering time I announced, "The head of one of the world's largest drug cartels is here today, and we are going to take up an offering for his army, you would neither give generously, willingly nor cheerfully. But what if I said, "The Lord Jesus Christ is here today, and everything you give today will be presented to him and used for His kingdom." Probably the only thing lighter than your heart after than would be your wallet. You would give generously, willingly, and cheerfully.

10. Do you realize that's our opportunity every single week? God wants you to enjoy giving. He wants you to be blessed by it. In just a few minutes you will have that opportunity. Why will you give? Who are you giving to? Is it a bill to be paid? Is it to impress the person next to you? Is it to honor God? How will you give? Generously? Willingly? Cheerfully.

¹ Blackman, A. (2014, November 10). Can Money Buy You Happiness? Retrieved February 23, 2017, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/can-money-buy-happiness-heres-what-science-has-to-say-1415569538>