

Call to Worship

Proverbs 11:24-25, 22:9

Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.

A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

Prayer of Invocation

Creator God, you value all who live, choosing the company of those who are pushed to the edges of life, with not even enough.

Our riches are nothing to Jesus Christ – weighed and found wanting and cast aside in the favor of the pearl of great price, that is love.

We would be your people, O God. Grant us access to the deep pools of compassion within your Spirit that we may be filled with the wonder of your life. Amen.

The Word

1 Timothy 6:17-19; Luke 6:36-38 NRSV

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. **They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.**

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. **"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.**

Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. **A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."**

Living the Word

A Theological Foundation for a Generous Life

We were created to be generous, yet we are tempted to hoard!

We don't like the word hoard as applied to ourselves. We envision a house with only a pathway through piles of stuff. That word is for those poor people who can't stop buying and keep everything. We are collectors. Someone gave us a salt and pepper shaker, someone else saw it admired it and then bought us a second set. We then went on vacation and thought that would be a fairly small souvenir we could take home and it began and grew. OR We acquired our parents special pieces of glass or books or furniture and we can't figure out how to let go of them.

Today we are talking about that and another kind of hoarding. When you have earned something and feel that you deserve the right to keep it. this could apply to things and wealth. It is good to be thrifty and save for emergencies, yet many of us are saving just to keep it for ourselves.

God created us with the willingness to give—to God and to others. This design is part of our makeup; we actually have the need to be generous. Yet there are two voices that work against our God-given impulse toward generosity and that tempt us to keep or hoard what we have.

- The voice of fear
Fear of what might happen to us, along with a misplaced idea about the true source of our security, keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. The truth is that hoarding offers us no real security in this world.
- The voice of self-gratification
Our culture tells us that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, *If I give, there won't be enough left for me.*

Defeating the voices

When we give our lives to Christ, invite him to be Lord, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to dissipate and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others. Although we still may wrestle with the voices from time to time, we are able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in Christ.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians that when we are guided by the Spirit we live in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And the more we grow in the Christ, realizing that our lives belong to him, the more generous we become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth.

Biblical reasons to give to God and others

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Last Tuesday there were five of us that went to the nursing homes to bless others. We see miracles happening every time. People that look so despondent when we arrive, perking up to sing the old hymns or moving their mouths to the words of the Lord's Prayer.

I always like when we end any kind of worship on an up-beat, so I asked to sing my favorite hymn to end. I may have mentioned that hymn here before: When We All Get to Heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!" Thin of what they might mean for someone of faith that yearn for that day, or the one unsure of the future to know will be together, celebrating, even in death. The vibe as we sang was very different when we left than when we arrived...We are blessed to be a blessing and every time we give to others of ourselves, we are the ones most blessed.

Another Biblical reason to give to God and others: "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). And "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1).

There are Biblical guidelines for giving

From the early days of the Old Testament, God's people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the first fruits or the *tithe*, and it equaled one-tenth of one's flocks or crops or income. Abraham was the first to give a tithe or tenth: Genesis 14:20b.

Next: "So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He called that place Bethel;[a] but the name of the city was Luz at the first. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you." Genesis 28:18-22

And within the laws, Leviticus 27:30-34; "These are the commandments that the Lord gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai: All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the Lord's; they are holy to the Lord. 31 If persons wish to redeem any of their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them. 32 All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one that passes under the shepherd's staff, shall be holy to the Lord. 33 Let no one inquire whether it is good or bad, or make substitution for it; if one makes substitution for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy and cannot be redeemed."

Giving a tithe

As Christians who live under the new covenant, we are not bound by the law of Moses; we look to it as a guide. Yet most Christians agree that the tithe is a good guideline for our lives, and one that is pleasing to God. Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you cannot tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are and will help you make the adjustments necessary to become more generous.

Giving beyond the tithe

Tithing is a floor, not a ceiling. God calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We should strive to set aside an additional percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects, schools, church building funds, and nonprofit organizations.

What Our Giving Means to God. How does our giving affect God?

From the earliest biblical times, the primary way people worshiped God was by building an altar and offering the fruit of one's labors upon it to God. They would burn the sacrifice of an animal or grain as a way of expressing their gratitude, devotion, and desire to honor God. The scent of the offering was said to be pleasing to God. It wasn't that God loved the smell of burnt meat and grain. Rather, God saw that people were giving a gift that expressed love, faith, and the desire to please and honor God, and this moved God's heart. When given in this spirit, our offerings bless the Lord.

What is God's response to our giving?

Luke 6:38 "give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Matthew 25:14-30 ¹⁴"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?' ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

What Our Giving Means to Us? Through it our hearts are changed.

When we are generous—to God and to our families, friends, neighbors, and others who are in need—our hearts are filled with joy. They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous.

In it we find the blessings of God.

Many Christians have it wrong. They say that if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that is not how it works. We do not give to God so that we can get something in return. The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back to us. Of course, there is no guarantee that if we tithe, we will never lose our job or never have other bad things happen to us. Nevertheless, when we give generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.

Closing Prayer

O God, we thank you that you have given us life, that you sustain us by the power of your Holy Spirit, and that you gave Jesus Christ as an offering for us and for our sins. We thank you for the abundance that we have in our lives. And we pray, O Lord, that you would help us. Help us to honor you with our tithes. Help us to care for the poor and those who are in need. Help us to recognize that it is more blessed to give than to receive. We offer ourselves to you. Guide us now as we prepare to fill out our commitment cards. Help us, O Lord, to do your will. Lead us, we pray. In your holy name. Amen.