

10 for 10

TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 6

No one can exercise for us.

An Opportunity to Exercise Our Faith

The last several weeks we have been discussing the Bible's teaching on giving in general and tithing in particular. We have seen how very strict the Old Testament laws were that governed tithing. The Prophet Malachi wrote that failure to tithe was robbing God of what was his by right. Tithing wasn't an option. It was a legal requirement for the Old Testament Israelite. Tithing was the starting point of giving. Offerings—offered freely, without legal requirement—were gifts *over and above* the tithe.

In the New Testament, the giving picture changes in a very important way. Tithing was no longer commanded. The law of tithing was fulfilled by Christ. Therefore if a Christian tithes, he tithes as a matter of Christ-accomplished freedom. Tithing can serve as a spiritual discipline—a handy guide for proportionate giving. Our tithes are no longer connected to the letters of God's law. Our tithes, instead, are connected to the Spirit's gift of faith in our hearts.

A story of stewardship comes to us from a small Midwestern town. A church received notice that their treasurer was moving out of town. The nominating committee recommended the name of a man who was the owner of the local grain elevator and a highly respected figure in the community. He agreed to serve—but with two strings attached: 1) No financial questions were to be asked for a year and 2) No financial reports would be given until the end of the year.

People were amazed when at the end of his first year in office, the mortgage was paid, the bills were current, the synod

received its offerings, the local high school received its subscription, and there was a five-figure surplus in the church checking account.

"How did you do it?" the people asked.

"It was easy," came the reply. "Most you do business with my grain elevator. I simply kept ten percent of your shares and gave them to the church in your name. You never even missed it!"

The story, obviously, never happened. The fictitious owner of the grain elevator would have been arrested for embezzlement!

Perhaps the biggest wrong, however, was that someone else had decided what to give for the rest of the congregation. The members had no opportunity to *grow* in the grace and in the joy of giving.

Giving is a matter of the heart. The Lord would have us grow in our trust in his promises. He wants us to *learn how to give*—generously and joyfully. He even invited his Old Testament believers to *test him* as they gave. Will God fail to bless his children today when they are filled with joyful generosity? He has already blessed us in a thousand ways!

Seek to stretch yourself. Make it a devotional goal to dig deeply into God's promises that relate to his generosity and your response to his goodness. Seek to grow in the grace of giving. If we are currently giving 5%, could the Lord possibly bless us to the point where we could regularly give 6%? If you are currently giving 2% of your income, is the Lord powerful enough to enable you to double your giving to 4%? God already knows the answer. Faith trusts that God's answers are for our good!

Questions to Ask God about Giving

Q: Because I have no choice but to leave all my money behind when I die, is it really "giving" to designate money to ministries in my will? (Although these may be the wisest places to leave my assets, it involves no sacrifice or need for faith.) Will I potentially rob myself of the joy of giving and an exercise in faith by holding on to significant assets until death that I could have given while I was still alive?

Q: One day when I stand before your throne, would you ever say to me, "You blew it! You sold those shares and fed the hungry and evangelized the lost, and then two years later the market peaked?" Or would you say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant?"

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 218
-219)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"The Jews were constrained to a regular payment of tithes; Christians, who have liberty, assign all their possessions to the Lord, bestowing freely not the lesser portions of their property, since they have the hope of greater things." – Irenaeus

"My pocketbook was baptized too." – General Sam Houston

Home Missions

Home Missions exists to plant new churches and assist mission-minded congregations in the United States, Canada, and English-speaking West Indies.

Because of God's gift of salvation for us, we're motivated to support home missions as they reach out to our neighbors, college students, and people of various cultures and languages with the ultimate gift: freedom from the burden of sin, death, and the devil and the promise of eternal life in heaven.

Your gifts for our synod's work are a blessing to all those who would be lost without our Savior, God's greatest gift to us all.



Giving is, simply put, an act of trust that expresses our love and gratitude to God for all that he is and does for us. We can be assured of God's blessing as we honor him with our first and our best. He knows all about giving the first and the best. He did precisely that when he gave us his Son!

Every one of us is giving at one level or another

Below – At – Beyond

Have you considered the fact that we are capable of giving at three different levels? We can give *below our ability*, according to our ability, or even *beyond our ability*. What does our checkbook or credit card statement reveal about ability to give? Where do our personal priorities lie? Are we inclined to give with a joy-filled heart of faith? Or are we more inclined to store up a doubt-inspired stockpile of treasures on earth?

God encourages our trust and stills our fears in 2 Corinthians 9:10–11. He reassures us that he knows our needs. Out of pure grace, he gives us even more than we need. He is generous beyond our ability to comprehend. Do you ever doubt that? If so, begin listing your blessings one-by-one. How long will it take before you reach the end of the list? Odds are you will tire of making the list long before you ever reach the end of the list!

Where are we at with our giving? Below, at, or even beyond ability? In Christ, God forgives the former. In Christ, God blesses you with the latter. May you find great joy in giving to Jesus this week!

2 Corinthians 8:10–15

God's Turn to Teach

¹⁰ And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹ Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹² For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

¹³ Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴ At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, ¹⁵ as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little." (NIV)

Learning from the mistakes of others

How Not To Give

The Situation

"There's a lot more to stewardship than money," says Gina. "We can't all give—but we can teach Sunday school, clean the building, and open our homes to guests. Some people are blessed with money to give. Some people have been blessed with time to volunteer. Others have been blessed with talents and abilities that the church needs."

The Problem

Gina rightly believes that stewardship involves more than money—but she wrongly believes that stewardship ever fails to include money. Her argument is just as faulty as saying, "I can't give the church any of my time or my gifts and talents, so I'll just give my money instead." God expects all of these, not just some of them. Gina is attempting to justify robbing God by "making up for it" by doing things that God has gifted her to do anyway.

God has given each of us 24 hours in a day. He has blessed each of us with gifts, talents, and abilities as members of the body of Christ. He has blessed each of us with material goods. He has entrusted each of us with his saving truth. God would have us use *all* of these blessings to his glory and our neighbor's good. We never use some of his gifts to the exclusion of other gifts.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 192)

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TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 7

Why Give?

Is Life about Giving or Getting?

The answer to that question depends on whom you ask. With a Starbucks in one hand and a gift card or credit card in the other, we live constantly in a culture that makes it easy to answer, "Life is about getting what you need and what you want." The message of advertisers is to persuade you to buy and then buy some more.

The Gospel message answers with a radically different message. With the debt of sin paid in full on a cross and God's Son now sitting again at his right side, believers now live understanding, "Real giving is God's giving." Jesus, God's gift to us, once said, "It is more blessed to give, than to receive" (Acts 20:35). That is so like Jesus because he was about giving. He gave his whole life on earth. And in his death he gave his life for us. The glory of the Gospel message is the fact that is nothing but GIVING.

We give a gift to our grandchildren and exchange them at seasonal holidays and to celebrate special moments of life. We give a gift to church. Perhaps one of the best gifts to consider giving is to ask Jesus to use us as channels of his love and mercy to others.

The implication of Jesus' words is clear, "My life is about giving!" May the Lord richly bless you as his blessings flow to others through you!

A Look At Proportional Giving

Who Gives the Most?

Think of all the different scenarios that take place during a Sunday morning offering. You place a check for \$50.00 in the offering plate. A 7th grader sitting behind you tosses in 50 cents. The person in front of you puts in a check for \$300.00.

The question begs to be asked: Who gave the most? Who gave the most back in Jesus' day when the rich men tossed handfuls of gold coins into the temple treasury? Can you picture the poor widow quietly dropping her two copper less-than-pennies into the treasury? Who gave more?

We ask the question. Jesus answers it. "I tell you the truth, he said, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:4).

The point? God doesn't measure our gifts by the amount we give, but by the proportion we give. The proportion of our gifts is directly connected with the heart's attitude. God knows the condition of our heart. He also knows the condition of our pocketbooks. He knows the bottom line of each and every bank account. When we give our offerings, he knows what we are keeping for ourselves.

Going back to our original scenario, mathematics teaches that the person who gave \$300.00 gave the most. Certainly \$300 is greater than two quarters given by the 7th grader! God, however, teaches that the 7th grader with the 50 cents may have given a far more substantial gift

Questions to Ask God about Giving

Q: Why do I want to hold on to my wealth? Am I trying to prove something? What am I trying to prove—and to whom? Is it pride? Power? Prestige? Selfishness? Insecurity? Fear? Am I a control freak? Or is it just because possessiveness is normal in our society, and I'm merely going with the flow? Do you want me to go with the flow or do something different—maybe radically different?

Q: Am I living to hear others say of me, "He or she is a great success" or to have you say to me, "Well done, my good and faithful servant?"

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 220)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"That bread which you keep belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you are able to help others, and refuse, so often did you do them wrong." – Augustine

World Missions

Our prayers and offerings support our synod's world mission outreach efforts, as they bring the light of God's Word to the world through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers, and providing religious materials in foreign languages.

Many of our missionaries and brothers and sisters around the world sacrifice their time, modern conveniences, and even personal well-being and security.

Yet trusting in God's promises, they take the treasure of Christ's love and share it with a world that will be lost without it.

than the person who gave \$300. If the 50 cents is given from a grateful heart and represents a generous proportion of the student's income, the gift pleases God. A gift of \$300 could sadden the Lord if it is given without faith, is given as an afterthought, or is a mere pittance of hundreds-of-thousands of dollars that are available to be used. Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48).

The widow loved and trusted in Jesus. She was therefore willing to give everything she had. She knew that Jesus would provide for her. May God give us the faith of the widow so that we also can give proportionately, generously, and even sacrificially. As our relationship with Jesus grows, so will the proportion of what we give him.

Learning from the mistakes of others

How Not To Give

The Situation

Tony is a young college grad and deeply in debt. He is so far in debt, that he doesn't

"have two dimes to rub together—let alone give one of them to church." He figures that it would give people a bad impression to stop his car payments. He also thinks that it would be bad stewardship to sell his car at a loss. "God wants me to be smart, doesn't he?"

The Problem

Tony hasn't been smart. In purchasing a car well beyond his ability to pay, he positioned himself into robbing God so that he could pay for a car he couldn't afford. Lifestyle is so important to Tony, that he is consistently borrowing to live beyond his means. He is spending money he doesn't have on possessions he doesn't need. He is unwilling to lose several hundred dollars on selling his over-priced car, even though it would position him to give more to God and free him from a significant portion of his debt.

Tony is acting as if he is the owner of God's possessions rather than the manager of God's possessions. Sadly, Tony's actions make it seem like God, the church, and area charities should pay for his not-so-smart choices.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 191)

2 Corinthians 9:6-11

God's Turn to Teach

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. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written:

"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;
their righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (NIV)

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TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 8

From the Pulpit: Mark 12:41-44

Should Jesus Really Be Watching My Wealth?

This morning we hear that Jesus is WATCHING. Take comfort! The Lord who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps. Jesus is WATCHING. Take warning! The Lord is watching every area of our lives, even if we don't think he has the right to, even when we don't want him to! "Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury" (v.41). Obviously, Jesus hasn't learned a thing about a person's right to privacy! But, if Jesus watched the people giving their offerings, at the temple, then that means he is also watching us do the same. Should Jesus really be watching our wealth? Hmm...

If it surprises you that Jesus sat down to watch people give their offerings, then it should doubly surprise you that this occurred TUESDAY of Holy Week. On Friday, he would be hung on the cross to die. With the clock ticking and all that must be done in the balance, what did Jesus do? He SAT DOWN in the temple courts at the very place where people GAVE THEIR OFFERINGS. He didn't sit there because he needed to take a breather. Jesus sat down specifically so that he could WATCH the people as they gave their offerings. The Greek word is explicit here: Jesus was studying the people as they gave their offerings and he did this for some time. For Lutherans, who are trained to be discrete when they put their envelopes into the plate, the thought of Jesus sitting there watching, staring, and studying makes us more than a bit uncomfortable.

Should Jesus really be watching wealth? If you and I were Jesus' personal advisors,

we would say, "Absolutely not. Jesus, you've got bigger fish to fry! You should be watching for a place to eat the Last Supper. You should be watching your step, because the Pharisees are trying to trip you up. You should be watching your back, because Judas is plotting to betray you. But watching what people do with their wealth? No way! Because you know Jesus, if you sit there watching people give their offerings, then you're going to give the impression that you're actually interested in what people give to you!"

So, what did Jesus see as he watched? He saw rich people throw in large amounts. This doesn't seem surprising. We sort of expect rich families to be big givers. After all, Jesus himself once said: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). But listen, there is another insight that the Greek gives us. It would seem that the wealthy were coming back to the offering line again and again. There was pomp and show to their offerings! It turns out that Jesus was not only watching the amount of their gifts, but was staring through their souls at their reasons for giving.

Jesus watched another person, a widow. No one would have mistaken her for a big giver. Can you picture the scene? But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Jesus was watching the widow's wealth too! What surprises us about her? That she was poor? No, Social Security wouldn't be invented for another 1,900 years. The amount? She offered two tiny copper coins—the bare minimum that could be paid for the temple tax. Again, not surprising.

What should surprise us, even shock us, is what we never would have known if

Questions to Ask God about Giving

Q: How can I better communicate with and pray with my spouse so we can walk together down this exhilarating road of giving, leading each other and not leaving the other behind?

Q: What am I doing to train my children to be generous givers—not just donors, but disciples?

Q: What handful of people in my unique sphere of influence do you want me to pray for and talk with about generous giving? Have you called me to mentor others in giving, that they may end up giving more than I do?

Q: What simple reminder of God's call to stewardship and giving can I make for myself, then pass on to others?

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 221)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Make as much as you can, save as much as you can, and give as much as you can." - John Wesley

"Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. Hoarding is idolatry." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Adult Discipleship

There is no end of needs every congregation faces as they serve their members. What an encouragement that we do not have to face these challenges alone!

Together with believers throughout North America, our Congregation Mission Offerings support a vision to enhance greater gospel ministry with plans and resources to help congregations better meet these needs: keeping members connected to their church family, ways to better knit members together as Christian friends, enrichment in marriage, and enhancing how we live out our God-given role in life.

What a blessing we support together as we serve in love of one another and our synod - family!



Jesus hadn't pointed it out. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others." This widow, this woman that no one else took notice of, was the one our Lord really noticed! She had given more of what she had than all the others. Can you picture the disciples scratching their heads? "You mean to tell me, Jesus, that this widow with her two copper coins gave more than the rich who gave their thousands?" To the eyes of men, it didn't make an ounce of sense. But Jesus could see what the disciples couldn't; he could see her soul. "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" (v. 44).

As Jesus watched, he saw the rich give out of what they had left over. They gave their thousands, but had thousands more to live on. They went home to a warm house, a full fridge, and a cozy bed. They gave big gifts, but there was precious little personal sacrifice attached. They gave some of the frosting on the cake, but they still had both cake and frosting leftover.

The widow didn't give frosting off the cake because she didn't even have cake. Instead, she gave her daily bread! She gave everything—all she had to live on, a few cents. The amount of her offering was tiny, but her self-sacrifice was total. She gave until she had nothing left—and at that very moment she still had absolutely everything. She had her Lord. She had God's promises and God's gift of faith to

trust them. And today's point? She gave even beyond her ability, because she trusted her Lord's ability to care for her.

(Continued next week.)

Learning from the mistakes of others How Not To Give

The Situation

Joe is a well-regarded leader in the church. He regularly speaks at meetings, encouraging members to raise called workers' salaries, support missions work more generously, and begin planning for a major building expansion. Joe often quotes Scripture to highlight his points. Both God and the financial secretary know that if everyone at church gave like Joe, the called workers would soon be cut, missions would cease, and the church would default on its current mortgage.

The Problem

Joe has lots to say, even biblical things, when it comes to other people's Christian lives. It is his personal relationship with the Lord that is struggling. He is quick to commit other people's money to the Lord's work, but clings tightly to his own. Saying one thing and secretly doing another is called hypocrisy. Joe doesn't need to start by giving. He needs to start by repenting, receiving the assurance of Christ's forgiveness, and bringing forth fruits of faith in keeping with repentance.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 192)

Psalm 146

God's Turn to Teach

¹ Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. ² I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. ³ Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. ⁴ When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. ⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the LORD, who remains faithful forever. ⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, ⁸ the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. ¹⁰ The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD. (NIV)