

BIBLICAL GIVING

by Karl House

What does the Bible teach about giving?

Stewardship

First, the Bible teaches that everything we have belongs to the Lord. Everything is a gift from the Lord, and therefore, we are responsible to Him for the use of all of it, whether we give it, spend it or save it. So ask the Lord how He would have you steward His money. As the Owner, He will guide you to be His grateful and faithful financial manager.

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

"Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more" (Matthew 25:20).

Firstfruits

Secondly, the Bible calls us to honor God with our firstfruits.

Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops (Proverbs 3:9).

On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Before you spend your income on living expenses, debt payment and saving for future responsibilities, give back to the Lord. Don't wait to see if there is enough money at the end of the week or month to give – there usually won't be. Instead, give when you get paid, trusting that God will provide, and that He will guide you to wisely live on the rest. Giving from your firstfruits rather than just your leftovers is a real step of faith. God will honor your faith as you honor Him with your wealth.

3 Types of Giving

Thirdly, there are 3 types of giving in the Bible.

The Tithe – The word “tithe” simply means 10%. The first place that tithing shows up in the Bible is in the life of Abraham (Genesis 14). After God gave Abraham a stunning victory over those who had kidnapped his nephew Lot and all of Lot’s family and belongings, Abraham gave Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High, a tenth of the spoils. This was a completely voluntary act of sheer gratitude toward God. So not only is Abraham the father of the faith, he is the father of tithing. The Old Testament law, then, builds on Abraham’s first act of tithing and the Old Testament prophets simply affirm it. For example, the Prophet Malachi calls for the tithe (10%) to be brought to the Temple to support the ministry of the priesthood.

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. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:10-11).

In the New Testament, the tithe continues. Jesus says ...

You are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things (Matthew 23:23).

Though Jesus obviously criticizes the legalistic tithing practices of the Pharisees, He specifically says we **should tithe** along with practicing justice, mercy and faith. In these words, Jesus endorses that tithing continues for His New Testament followers. And certainly as those who have been touched by God’s free grace in Christ, we should be at least as grateful and generous as those who lived under Old Testament law.

In the New Testament, financial gifts also continue to be given to support the ministry of the local church.

They brought the money ... and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need (Acts 4:34-35).

Those who are taught the word of God should provide for their teachers, sharing all good things with them (Galatians 6:6).

The place to start your giving is the tithe. Regardless of what you make, give 10% of it to the local church. As you mature spiritually and prosper financially, you will be able to give an even higher percentage of your income back to the Lord's work.

Offerings – Offerings (or freewill offerings) go over and above the tithe and are given to Kingdom causes and needs both within and beyond the local church. The Prophet Malachi mentions both tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8). Following Old Testament guidelines on freewill offerings, the Apostle Paul gave comparable instructions for the special offering that was being given to the Christians suffering from a famine in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8 & 9). Unlike the tithe, where the percentage is set by the Lord, the amount of an offering is freely determined by the giver. Start with a tithe, and as the Lord leads you, give to other needs and causes through offerings.

Alms – Alms are spontaneous gifts given to those in need. They may be in the form of money, groceries or other assistance. This is an important way to make God's invisible love visible to those in need around you. Notice needs and let God guide you as you do small things with great love. God is always pleased when we give generously to the poor. (See Acts 10:1-4.) And here is a wonderful promise for those who do: **If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you (Proverbs 19:17).**

Giving is a great adventure of faith and gratitude. Grow in all three types of giving. Begin with the **tithe** to the local church. Allow God to move your heart to give **offerings** to other Kingdom causes. And keep your eyes open to the needs of others and give **alms**.

Discipleship

Finally, in the Bible giving isn't so much about raising funds for the church as it is about raising disciples within the church. Although, it must be said that the primary way that God provides for His church and Kingdom is through tithes and offerings. But still the Bible's emphasis falls on raising disciples and not just raising funds. I think Randy Alcorn has it right: **I've never seen a mature Christian who wasn't also a mature steward. Giving is part of growing.**

The church is called to help us grow as disciples of Jesus. And an important area of discipleship is giving.

So we encourage all first time givers to become regular givers. We encourage all regular givers to become proportional givers (that is, 10% tithers). And we encourage all proportional givers to become extravagant givers whose lives overflow with cheerful generosity.

The bottom line is that money isn't just about money. Money is about priorities. As Jesus said, **Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also** (Matthew 6:21).

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