

# Giving to God

November 26, 2017

Today we're going to look at some verses in the Bible that talk about Giving to God.<sup>1</sup> As I was studying for this sermon, I found myself wondering, isn't Giving to God a bit like giving to Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos? I mean, both of these guys are so wealthy; they've been leap frogging each other in terms of the most personal wealth to the tune of \$90 billion. Recently Bezos crossed the \$100 billion-dollar mark!<sup>2</sup> That's billion with a "B." Why would we ever think that either of these two guys would need any more money? In a similar way, God is incredibly wealthy. Psalm 24:1 declares, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."<sup>3</sup> And yet, even though God already owns everything and He's a "gazillionaire," He invites us to bring Him our offerings. So, this is worth talking about today. Why should we give to God?

**1. Giving to God lives out a right theology.** Philippians 3:20 says, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." We can either live just for the now or we can live in view of eternity. Giving helps us to keep eternity in view. When we DON'T practice giving to God, it's easy to lose perspective on what this life is all about. If we are spending every dollar we have on ourselves, we are losing the eternal vantage point that comes from a Christian worldview. In his classic book, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn says, "Where we choose to store our treasures depends largely on where we think our home is."<sup>4</sup>

There's an old joke about a man who dies and when he shows up at the entrance to heaven, he asks if he can speak to the Apostle Peter. So Peter meets him at the entrance and says, "welcome to heaven Brother, how can I help you?" The man says, "well Peter, I know everything that we need has been prepared for us by Jesus, but I wondered if you could make an exception and let me bring one item into heaven with me?" Peter says, "well, what's the item?" The guy proceeds to drag a big duffle bag over to Peter. Peter looks in the bag and sees a bunch of solid gold bars and he says, "You brought your own pavement?"<sup>5</sup> In heaven, the streets will be made of gold and the economy will be different than anything we've ever known.

A. W. Tozer puts it this way, "As base a thing as money often is, it yet can be transmuted into everlasting treasure. It can be converted into food for the hungry and clothing for the poor; it can keep a missionary actively winning lost [people] to the light of the gospel and thus transmute itself into heavenly values. Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality."<sup>6</sup> A 2<sup>nd</sup> reason that we should give to God is that...

**2. Giving to God shows reverence.** God is worthy of our worship and giving in His Name brings Him glory. I ran into a very sobering passage in Malachi 1 this week. God confronts His people for giving Him an unacceptable offering. Malachi 1:14 says, "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations."

There is a question of respect here; the honor due His name. God reminds His people that the God we serve is not just any god; He is the LORD Almighty. He is worthy of the very best we have to offer. A 3<sup>rd</sup> reason that we should give to God is that...

**3. Giving to God helps those in need which results in thanks to God.**<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:12-13 says, "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else."

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<sup>1</sup> Find helpful, encouraging information on giving at [www.generousgiving.org](http://www.generousgiving.org). Note the MEDIA tab options including podcasts and literature.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://money.cnn.com/2017/10/27/news/companies/bezos-gates-billionaires/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> See also Deuteronomy 10:14, Psalm 50:10 & 89:11, and Job 41:11.

<sup>4</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, Multnomah, Sisters, OR, 2001, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> See Revelation 21:21. Also, consider the gripping ending of the movie, "Schindler's List."

<sup>6</sup> A. W. Tozer, "The Transmutation of Wealth," *Born After Midnight*, Christian Publications, Harrisburg, PA, 1959, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 John 3:17.

Our church's Benevolence Fund and ministries like our Christmas Caring Tree are designed to help with real needs. It is such a blessing to love and serve one another in tangible ways. John Stott says, "Christian generosity is fundamentally an outflow of the generosity of God."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, when we are able to give and receive financial help from one another in the body of Christ, it's a way to let God flow through us. In order for this to work, we need to be willing to ask for help when we need help and we need to be willing to give the help when we are able to help.<sup>9</sup> It's that simple. When done properly, giving to God and giving for His purposes will result in real needs being met and in genuine expressions of thanks being directed to God.<sup>10</sup> A 4<sup>th</sup> reason that we should give to God is that...

**4. Giving to God supports God's work on this earth.** Our church began back in 1924 with a SS class that met at the old Carr Lake School. I'm guessing that even back then they received a small offering to help cover their ministry expenses and to support a missionary or two. If my guess is right, then that means for approximately 93 years, people have been faithfully giving to support the ministry of this local fellowship. 93 years is a great legacy of Christian generosity and ministry support.

That faithful giving continues even up to the offering we receive each Sunday. We try to be very transparent about the money that comes in and goes out of our church. In fact, if you look at the back of your bulletin, you'll see our most recent giving update. Our General Ministry Fund is doing pretty well but we are about 5 % behind for the year. Our Global Partner's Fund is almost 8% behind. I share this not so much because we are in need but just to lay it out plainly. The ministries in and through this church are blessed by the tithes and offerings of the people in this room. You are the ones who are making it happen right now.

So, on behalf of our church, let me say thank you for your faithful giving. Many of you have been giving for years, consistently and generously. And, although I don't know any details of who is giving or how much anyone is giving, I am exceedingly thankful and inspired by the incredible track record of giving of God's people in our church. And, I'm proud to be one of the Christ-followers here, where I can bring my own tithes and offerings! If any of us are able to increase our giving and we are feeling God leading us to do that, then we should do it. If any of us are not currently giving<sup>11</sup> and we'd like to begin, then there are offering envelopes at the church that you can pick up. It is such an amazing blessing to financially support the incredible ministries of this local fellowship. I hope you'll consider joining us.<sup>12</sup>

The Bible gives us a great example of how churches should be careful with the offerings they receive. 2 Corinthians 8:19-21 says, "What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man."

At Efree Bemidji, we are making a concerted effort to rightly handle God's money. Our annual budget is made public at our congregational meetings so that members can see directly where every penny is going. Our Trustee Board reviews these figures in detail every month at their meetings. We have an intentional system of checks and balances to make sure that the money is handled properly and directed where it is supposed to go.<sup>13</sup> If you have any questions at all, please contact one of our Trustees, their names and faces are posted on the foyer bulletin board. All giving is held with strict confidentiality. Not even I, as the Lead Pastor, know anything about who gives or how much they give. That's between you and God. So, a quick review: Why should we give to God?

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<sup>8</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Stott on Stewardship, Ten Principles of Christian Giving*, Vol. 1, Numbers 1, Generous Giving, Inc., 2003, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Note Luke 3:11 and Acts 4:34-35.

<sup>10</sup> If the only person being thanked for our charitable giving is us, we've missed one of the greatest opportunities in giving to God. "Truly Christian giving leads people not only to thank us the donors, but to thank God, and to see our gift in the light of his – the indescribable gift of his Son." (John Stott, p. 14)

<sup>11</sup> Note Deuteronomy 16:16-17, "...No one should appear before the LORD empty handed..." (Also see Exodus 34:20)

<sup>12</sup> It's interesting to note, not everyone can necessarily afford a full tithe or to give God all that they would like to. For example, part of the tithe in the Old Testament was used to help the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who couldn't support themselves. Well, obviously those people were not able to bring a 10% tithe. In the Old Testament, we see adjustments made for those who were less fortunate. For example, see Leviticus 5:7 & 11.

<sup>13</sup> Let me make this clear, we are practicing due diligence to make sure we never mishandle or misappropriate any of the money that people give in our offerings. Our tithes and offerings either come in electronically or our ushers receive them in our public offering and secure them immediately. These funds are counted and recorded by our Financial Secretary and one other witness. No one else is privy to these details. All checks and outgoing funds are handled by a different set of people to ensure a proper set of checks and balances. Our Church Treasurer makes the payments but he can't sign the checks. Any check requires the signature of one of our elected Trustees. No one on the church staff can sign checks from our primary account.

1. Giving to God lives out a right theology. 2. Giving to God shows reverence. 3. Giving to God helps those in need which results in thanks to God. 4. Giving to God supports God's work on this earth.

Now that we've considered some reasons WHY we should give to God, how do we decide...

How much should we give to God? **Some would say we should give a 10% tithe.** God challenges the Nation of Israel in Malachi 3:8-10, ""Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 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." "Tithe"<sup>14</sup> means one tenth or 10%. I actually did a little research on tithing. In the Old Testament, the tithe was used in at least **3 different ways**:<sup>15</sup>

1. The bulk of the tithes were given to the Levites after the harvest.<sup>16</sup> In Numbers 18:21-24 God says, "I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting... They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the LORD." So here, we see the tithe being used to support the Levites and their ministry work. They were kind of the church staff of their day if you will. The Levites were not given any land so the tithe was their way of getting paid. A 2<sup>nd</sup> way tithes were used was...

2. A small portion of this tithe would be enjoyed when the whole Jewish community was required to celebrate the harvest together with a sacred meal. In Deuteronomy 14:22-23 they were told, "Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always." This sacred meal was to be eaten in the LORD's presence, which for a time meant the sanctuary in Jerusalem for example. You could say it was the equivalent of a massive mandatory potluck dinner or a harvest party. Only a small portion of the overall food was eaten at the meal. The rest of the tithe went to the Levites. A 3<sup>rd</sup> way tithes were used was...

3. Every 3<sup>rd</sup> year, the tithes were brought to all of the area towns and made available to those with financial needs. This was a tithe specifically structured to support the needs of those who couldn't otherwise support themselves. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 explains it this way, "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."<sup>17</sup> Today this might look like something like restocking all of the local food shelves throughout Israel.<sup>18</sup>

These tithes were so intertwined with the customs and festivals of the Jewish nation, that it is hard to directly translate it forward to the New Testament church. In fact, we actually don't find the term "tithe" in the New Testament. Over time however, Christians have pretty much adopted the tithe, or 10%, as the general standard for Giving to God. One helpful distinction can be to differentiate tithes from offerings. **Tithes** are the 10% of our income that we give to our primary ministries. **Offerings** are any other giving above/beyond our tithe.

Now, not everyone practices it exactly the same way. And, frankly, I'm hoping to avoid overstepping my bounds with this sermon or compelling anyone to feel any guilt or coercion. Giving to God is a joy and privilege and it's vital that we not lose sight of that. So, please don't get bogged

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<sup>14</sup> מעשר

<sup>15</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, see Leviticus 27:30 note on p. 196 and Deuteronomy 14:22-29 note on p. 281.

<sup>16</sup> From which they, in turn, tithed a portion to the priests. See Numbers 18:25-32.

<sup>17</sup> See also Deuteronomy 26:12.

<sup>18</sup> Scholars in the Old Testament debate whether there was only one tithe or perhaps two or three tithes. Ultimately, it seems best to conclude that there was only one tithe but the details as to how that tithe was collected and dispersed changed over time with changes in how God's people lived. For example, tithing during the wilderness wandering may have been handled differently than tithing in the promised land once a more permanent place of worship was erected and the people spread out. (See discussion on p. 757 of *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 5.)

down in the math or the percentages. Rather, let God speak to your mind and heart about what He would have you give for His purposes. When answering the question, “how much should we give to God?” **Some would say: 10% is too low, God deserves everything we have.**

It would be fair to say that only giving God 10% misses the point: it’s all His already. “The aim of all tithing was to acknowledge that all man had belonged to God.”<sup>19</sup> The 10% is meant to be representative for the whole. Giving a consistent 10% of our firstfruits acknowledges that all we have is from God and for His glory. Verses like Romans 12:1 really get closer to the point, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Our whole life is meant to be a sacrifice to God, NOT just our money. This week I found a really cool verse in 1 Chronicles 29:14, “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”<sup>20</sup>

I once heard a comedian joke about the silliness of limiting our lives to a 10% tithe. #579 in our church hymnals is the song, “I surrender all.” To make his point, this comedian changed the words to **I surrender 10%:** “10% to Jesus, I surrender, 10% to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live. I surrender 10%, I surrender 10%. 10% to Thee my blessed Savior, I surrender 10%.”

One day Jesus was talking to a very wealthy young man and Mark 10:21-22 tells us, “Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” I imagine this wealthy young man might have preferred it if Jesus had only asked him for 10%. I share this because it sobering for us to consider. Let’s be careful not to assume that just because we are giving a consistent 10% tithe, we’re done. We need to recognize that God may be asking more from some of us.<sup>21</sup> When answering the question, “how much should we give to God?”

**Some would say: it’s a different amount for each of us.** 1 Corinthians 16:2 gives one example of giving in the early church, “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” And, 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “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.”<sup>22</sup> As much as the 10% tithe can be a helpful benchmark, we don’t find evidence of the tithe principle being taught in the New Testament Church. What we do find though is a lot of teaching about good stewardship and the importance of being generous. Giving to God is meant to be an overflow from our hearts. Something that comes with joy rather than reluctance. Something stirred by a heart of worship.

My prayer for all of us today morning is that we will take some time this week to genuinely reevaluate our Giving to God. As we recover from Black Friday Shopping and prepare for Cyber Monday tomorrow, let us also consider how we are Giving to God throughout the year. Christmas is filled with great stories and expressions of bringing gifts to God. From the story of the little drummer boy who could only bring the gift of song, to the wise men’s exquisite gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, we are caused to consider carefully what gift is fitting for us to bring our king.

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on November 26, 2017 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

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<sup>19</sup> Tenney, p. 757.

<sup>20</sup> See also Exodus 36:2-7. Amazing.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus commends the poor widow’s offering in Mark 12:41-44, “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” As this poor widow demonstrates, it’s not necessarily just the rich who may be called to give more than 10%. (Also consider Romans 12:6-8, esp. v. 8)

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:12 says, “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.”