

# Some thoughts on financial giving for followers of Jesus

Someone said to me recently, “I want to start giving money to church, but how much do I give?”

In response to that question, and in case you’re wondering the same, or have never really thought about it, let me share some short thoughts. They’re in no particular order, apart from maybe the first. And I pray that you find it helpful as you consider your own response to God with your money.

First, 2 preliminary thoughts...

ONE:

My starting point is the assumption that God’s people give financially. That has always been the case for God’s people. Throughout Scripture, God’s people have always given. And through the financial gifts of His people God has provided not only for the ongoing work of growing His Kingdom, but also for the meeting of material needs in others. And in the Sermon on the Mount – Jesus’ manifesto on how His followers are to live – he assumes that giving is the norm. In Matthew 6:2, Jesus says, “So when you give...” – do you hear how he assumes giving as the norm?

TWO:

You’ll notice that I provide verses for each point. Whenever I’m trying to build a biblical framework for what Scripture says about a certain subject (in this instance, giving), I find it helpful to take the verses as a whole, and ask what the overall thrust of these verses is. If I take them as a whole, what’s the picture of giving that I am left with? So please don’t see these 10 points as ‘rules’ to follow – see them as contributing to an overall picture.

## 1 Any thinking on giving starts with God

*John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

God, in his very nature, is a GIVING God. That's what perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible tells us - out of the overflow of His love, God gave. And not only did God give...but He did so in an overwhelmingly generous way - He gave us everything...He gave us His very own Son.

And, as people made in His image, we are created to reflect who God is and what God is like. That means, amongst other things, that we are to reflect His generosity in the way that we give. In short, followers of Jesus are to be generous givers because that's what God is like. Yes, it's something we grow into...in increasing measure we will become more like God...but know this...God wants to grow us as generous givers because it's part of the way we reflect what He is like to the world around us. Generosity should be our goal.

## 2 We give out of what belongs to God

*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 only what comes from your hand."*

In the verse above, David rejoices in the generous gifts that the people of Israel have made towards the building of the temple. His prayer of thanksgiving is a great reminder of biblical truth - that all we have comes from God and belongs to God. We are, if you like, stewards. We care for all that God has entrusted to us.

When we see things as "mine", we tend to be close-handed. But when we understand that all we have has been entrusted to us by God, we are freed to become more open-handed.

## 3 Giving is between you and God

*Matthew 6:1-4 - "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."*

*So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

Giving is an expression of our love for God – it's a way we respond in love to all he has done for us. Giving is to flow from our heart...it's an act of worship. Giving is for God and to God. It's not something we do to win the approval of others...it's to be a secret, act of devotion. Giving secretly is a way that we can protect our hearts from any impure motive.

## **4 Give thoughtfully**

*2 Corinthians 9:7 begins - "each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give..."*

Paul encourages the Corinthians to give some deliberate thought to what they give – to give what they have decided in their heart to give. Whatever they were to give was to be both a head and a heart decision.

Likewise, we should give prayerful thought to how much give. Don't just pluck a figure from thin air – think about it; do so in the context of your wider income; and involve God in the process. Don't just wait and see what's left over at the end of a month, sit down and plan. Factor in your giving to your monthly budget.

## **5 Give freely, cheerfully and eagerly**

*2 Corinthians 9:7 - "Each of you should give what you have decided in your own heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

Don't give because someone tells you that you have to. Don't give because you feel your arm being twisted. Don't give dragging your heels. Don't give an amount that someone else sets. Don't give out of fear.

Give because you want to. Give freely. Give eagerly. Give cheerfully.

## **6 Give regularly and proportionately**

*1 Corinthians 16:1 - "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."*

Paul encourages the Corinthians to give regularly – on the first day of every week. My sense is that this is linked to a pay period – they probably got paid weekly. So, if you get paid weekly, work it out on that basis. If fortnightly or monthly, then work it out that way.

And Paul wants them to work out their giving as a proportion (percentage) of their income. That's what he means when he says 'in keeping with your income'. Practically, this might mean reviewing what you give as your income changes.

Incidentally, something becomes a habit when we practice it regularly. If we want something that is good for us to come to shape and characterise us, then we need to do it regularly. God will work in us to make us more like Him, as we practice giving on a regular basis.

## **7 See your giving as an investment**

*2 Corinthians 9:6 - "Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."*

When we give to God's work, we are investing in something eternal. We are investing in a work that will bear fruit. In 2 Corinthians 9:6 Paul uses the language of sowing. Imagine a farmer sowing seeds - he sows seeds expecting them to grow and produce a harvest. It's the same when we give to God - we are sowing into the work of his Kingdom. We might not always see the results, but we trust that God is using what we give to grow his kingdom.

## **8 Give and be blessed**

*Acts 20:35 - "It is more blessed to give than to receive"*

God blesses us when we give!

Don't hear what I'm not saying! God does not necessarily bless us financially in response to our generous giving (although he might choose to).

But God does bless us! He blesses us by using our giving to grow us spiritually; he blesses us by using our giving to make us more like Jesus; he blesses us by using our giving to allow us to experience delight as we see the fruit of our giving; he blesses us by using our giving to root us more deeply in the work of His Kingdom as we invest in it. And so much more...

We might not like thinking about the blessing attached to giving, but we cannot avoid both Jesus' words that Luke quotes in Acts 20:35 and what Paul writes says in 2 Corinthians 9:6 - "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" - God allows us to experience a 'reward' for our giving.

## 9

### **Giving is an act of defiance**

*Romans 12:2 (The Message) - "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking."*

We live as followers of Jesus in the midst of spiritual warfare. One of Satan's tactics is to take what is good and tempt us to misuse it. And in our own battle with our brokenness, we find it all too easy to look for in things that which only God can give us - we think that sex or status or possessions....or money...will give us the deepest longings of our heart. Our task is not made easier knowing that we live in a culture that is characterised by greed and accumulation - a continual thirst for more and more and more. Even as followers of Jesus, we can find it hard not to be shaped by the culture around us. Paul warns us of this in Romans 12:2 (see above).

In addition, Paul knows that our sinful hearts find it easy to take something that is good (money) and allow it to get a hold on our hearts in a way that is not good. This is what Paul warns of in 2 Timothy 4: when he says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil....".

We must find a way of resisting both Satan's tactics and our own sinful desires. I believe that being generous with our money is a way that we can do this. Generous giving is an act of defiance against Satan, and an act of fighting our flesh.

## 10

### **Give because of love**

*2 Corinthians 8:8 - "I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love..."*

You may have noticed that I have purposefully stayed away from talking about tithing. The tithe is the Old Testament principle of giving 10% of your income to God (tithe literally means 'tenth'.) Christians differ on whether they think the tithe is a rule for Christians to follow today. Many Christians find it a useful principle to guide them, rather than a rule to follow.

In the book of Philemon (where the context is not to do with money and giving) Paul wants Philemon to respond to what he's writing in a certain way. But he says to him, "I could command you Philemon, but instead I appeal to you on the basis of love." Paul wants Philemon to respond on the basis of love, not because he has to.

It's the same with the verse above (where the context is about money and giving). Giving is an opportunity for us to allow God's love which is at work in us, to be worked out into our daily lives.

Our giving as followers of Jesus is not about following rules. Instead, it is about prayerfully surrendering to what we know to be true about Jesus and His Word and His ways, and allowing His Spirit to shape us and grow us. Anyway, rules only limit (which isn't always a bad thing), but in the area of giving, why place limits?!

## So what does this look like in practice?

Well...maybe frustratingly, particularly if you are the type of person that wants nice, clean answers, it can look different for different people.

Giving is an area of our discipleship that, individually, we need to prayerfully consider.

So for Joy and I, it looks something like this...

Early on in our marriage we agreed to aim to give a certain percentage of our income - we found this a helpful starting point. The majority of this goes to our church. The rest goes to a number of Christian organisations that reflect causes that we care about. In addition, we also 'give' some money each month into a separate account which we call our 'giving fund'. Then, when needs present themselves to us, we have money set aside to give. Finally, if we get other unexpected amounts or gifts, we aim to give a percentage of these too. Our experience...at least mine...maybe to begin with, was that giving money away didn't always feel easy. But God has grown us in it. I believe God has used the discipline of giving to free us from being enslaved to money, of allowing us to delight in seeing the money at work in his Kingdom, and as part of the process of growing us to be more like Jesus.

We, like you, are a work in progress. And I pray that you would find what I have written helpful as you consider your own response to God in the area of giving.

So to conclude...:

- Give as image-bearers
- Give as stewards
- Give lovingly
- Give in secret
- Give thoughtfully
- Give freely, cheerfully and eagerly
- Give regularly
- Give proportionately
- Give to invest
- Give and be blessed
- Give defiantly
- Give because of love