



## Our Perspective on Giving

### Introduction

Jesus had a lot to say about handling money, and particularly about giving. Handling money and giving also features in the book of Acts and the Letters. All this makes it clear that our approach to money, and particularly to giving, is an important topic. Giving is vital to the operation of the church, but more than that it's something that God wants us to be good at, both as a church and individually.

*"But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and your love for us - see also that you **excel in this grace of giving**"*  
2 Corinthians 8:7, emphasis added.

As with everything that God asks us to do, excelling in giving will release blessing and life, to both those who receive and to us who give, and will result in praise and glory to God. This perspective explains the approach to giving that we seek to encourage and foster within the church.

### Starting with Stewardship

A proper understanding of handling money and giving can only be reached by first understanding the idea and practice of stewardship.

Stewardship can be defined as: The management of resources belonging to another in order to achieve the owner's objectives; and from this there are benefits.

Jesus' parables of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the Minas (Luke 19:1-27) show stewardship in practice. Stewardship begins with understanding that God is both Lord of all and giver of all. As Lord, God is the object of our lives, and we seek Him as the object of our energy, our purpose, our goals, our ambitions and our significance. When we understand God's lordship, our role and purpose as stewards (managers) becomes clear. We are to use all we have been given in the best way for God's purposes and glory.

Sonship and stewardship are inextricably interlinked. Stewardship is an expression of sonship as we partner with our Father in the family business. Our 'work' as stewards becomes an expression of worship, a free, joyous response to the grace of God toward us in Jesus Christ, and a source of pleasure in using what we have in order to meet the needs of others and enable them to hear the gospel and turn to Christ.

Stewardship must become a discipline, and so must be carefully cultivated. There will always be something or someone clamouring for our resources, and without discipline, our best intentions to use our time, talents and treasure for kingdom purposes easily come to little or nothing. So what might disciplined stewardship look like? It might look like scheduling time to meet with God in the Bible and by praying every day, or using your spiritual gifts to serve God and the gospel within the church family and beyond, or volunteering in a community project, or designating a portion of your income for the church each month before paying other bills so that the use of your treasure remains consistent with your most treasured priorities.

Success in stewardship is defined by whether we are faithful in using our resources, and as we are faithful with what we have been given, we will be entrusted with more.

Biblical stewardship is liberating, exhilarating and purposeful. It frees us to be content with what God has given us and to use what God has entrusted to us for His kingdom purposes. It is the essence of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, as we offer back to God all that we are, all that we have and all that we do. It is in this context that we start to understand handling money and giving.

### **Tithing – important or irrelevant?**

Tithing is usually taught and thought of as giving a tenth of your income or profits to the church. It has clear biblical roots. The idea runs like a thread through the Old Testament, from Abraham and Jacob in Genesis, through its formalisation in the Law, to the final book, Malachi. However, the New Testament hardly mentions it and never teaches it. Instead it links giving to grace, teaches generosity and describes situations where giving significantly exceeded 10%.

The pattern of the Old Testament tithe does provide some useful guidance on the practice of giving. Giving must be practiced as worship and so come from the heart. Giving is to provide for the people and buildings specially set aside for God's work, and to meet the needs within the community. Giving is to be primary (first), systematic, organised and proportional. Faithful giving is rewarded by God. All these points are endorsed and developed in the New Testament.

So tithing is important in the principles and pattern it teaches, and the percentage which was set under the Old Covenant must be at least an indicator, if not a minimum, for what New Covenant generosity should look like. However, tithing is not relevant as a formal requirement on believers.

### **Giving on the ground**

God's clear desire and the truth of stewardship mean that we must ensure that we excel in giving whilst not compromising our values of grace and spiritual freedom by making it a legal demand.

Through our faith in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit we have been born again and become children of God and citizens of His kingdom. We are a community of believers called together for a specific purpose, to fulfil God's mission and see His kingdom operate on earth. This identity and purpose must shape our stewardship, and in particular our giving. The New Testament indicates that our giving should provide for the effective functioning of our own church, support the wider preaching of the Gospel and help those in particular need. How we allocate our giving is between each of us and the Lord, but the biblical pattern is that our first priority is to be contributing to the operating of the church family of which we are part.

As a church family, God has given us a vision, and He will provide the resources required for the vision through us, His people. Each of us has a part to play in this great plan, as we freely and generously contribute our gifts, skills, time, resources and finances towards God's kingdom mission assigned to us as a church community.

The vision has financial needs associated with it. Funds are needed for staff, premises and equipment, to enable ministries and events, to help those in need, and more. So we, God's people, must get our hearts right before Him, obey what His Word says about money and giving, and give. In our church family, we will not use pressure or gimmicks to get you to give. Your giving is to be a heart matter between you and God. A cheerful, willing response

to the love He has shown you at the cross. As to the amount, the New Testament principle is give as much as you can. If you are unsure where to start, one option is to borrow the tithe idea, and begin with 10%, then increase it as God prospers you. Whatever amount you decide on, give regularly whenever you receive income, and give first, before you start spending. As we all do this, the financial needs of the vision will be met. Indeed, as we all respond to God's grace by giving generously, all our needs will be met, and we will find that we are able to increase both the amount and scope of our giving. This is His promise and He will be faithful to it.

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:8*