

STEWARDSHIP, GIVING and GENEROSITY. Why We Give To God

dan o'deens. 6.3.2024

At Breathe we believe that the only way to understand any aspect of life is to view it through the lens of the gospel. Money is a funny thing...people are super sensitive about their finances. Jesus talked about money a lot. People ask me questions all the time about tithing and offerings. When we give, are we giving to God or the Church? Is it ok to give to 'pet projects'? These are all great questions. We will discuss terms like 'offerings, giving, tithing, gift in kind, generosity and stewardship.' Let's dive in.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul discusses the effect the gospel should have on the way Christians understand wealth: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Seeing Christ's sacrificial love for us, that he gave up everything so that we could inherit the riches of heaven, helps us develop a healthy attitude toward our material possessions and become people who are both generous and joyful.

Understanding the riches we have already received in Christ not only liberates us from excessive concern over our wealth, talents and time, but also motivates us to invest them in the eternal kingdom of God.

A steward is a person who has been entrusted with another's resources and who seeks to manage those resources according to the owner's vision and values. The gospel calls us to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God — and that those gifts are to be used for his glory and to further his kingdom. Scripture even calls Christians caretakers of God's gifts and truth (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Corinthians 4:1).

We at Breathe recognize that in addition to acting as responsible stewards of our talents and skills, we must also be stewards of our possessions and finances, and we have a variety of tools to help you better understand stewardship.

What is generosity?

Generosity is the natural, consistent, and occasionally spontaneous giving of our material possessions to God's service and to our communities because of and modeled after what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. As God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32), so our posture toward God and others in response to his love should be one of cheerful sacrifice and generosity.

What is stewardship?

A steward is a person who has been entrusted with, and who manages, another's resources according to the owner's vision and values. Each of us was created for stewardship by God (Genesis 1:28). A steward is both a ruler with authority to govern resources and a slave accountable to the owner of those resources. The New Testament calls Christians caretakers of God's truths and gifts — even God's grace (1 Corinthians 4:1; 1 Peter 4:10).

Bottom Line: When we give we might say, "we participated in an act of joyful generosity responding in obedience to God's prompting as stewards of all that God has entrusted to us."

What is the basis for the tithe?

In the Old Testament, believers were required to give a tenth of their income to the support of the ministry and the needs of the poor. The New Testament teaches that we should give as we are "able and even beyond [our] ability" (2 Corinthians 8:3). Therefore, the tithe (10%) is often seen as a kind of minimum or starting guideline for giving.

Do I give 10% of my gross or net income?

Scripture teaches that we are to give back to God our “first fruits” (Exodus 23:16, 19). Proverbs 3:9 encourages us to “honor the Lord with [our] wealth, with the first fruits of [our] crops,” meaning the primary and choicest of our possessions. God has modeled “first fruits” by giving us his son, Jesus Christ. Our response to God should reflect our love of and devotion to him. Practically, the LORD is the first line or ‘chart of account’ in our personal budget. When people ask should I give according to my gross or net income, I simply reply, “do you want God to bless you on your gross or your net?”

What if I am unable to give 10% right now?

There are seasons in our economic life. There are financial responsibilities to our families, friends, communities, and in some cases, creditors. God is aware of those seasons. In any stage of life, good planning is necessary to increase our giving over time without neglecting our legal and personal financial obligations. For some people, 10% is too low a starting point. For others, giving even 5% is a sacrifice. The goal is to increase one’s commitment up to and above 10%, so that it models Christ’s love to our communities.

Is ‘Gift In Kind’ a part of my offering and stewardship?

Sure. Gift in Kind ‘saves’ the church resources but it does not necessarily help the ongoing budget need other than what they would have to ‘spend’ if you did not give. The problem with this mindset is that it can contribute to our desire to give to our passions and personal projects rather than help us create a mindset of giving our resources to God and trusting in His leadership in the local church. There is nothing wrong with gift in kind, but in the wholistic teachings of Jesus, this should ‘not’ be the normal aspect of our giving and should be in tandem to ongoing, regular giving.

Should I give all of my tithe and offering to Breathe Community Church?

The answer to this is a qualified no. Your gift is an act of personal worship to God in response to his grace in your life and the gift of his Son. The allocation of your money and time to God’s service should be a byproduct of prayer and of consultation with other Christians to whom you are accountable. However, if you consider Breathe your “home church,” you should consider allocating a significant portion of your generosity to the community where you invest most of your time and where others are investing in you.

Isn’t there more to generosity and stewardship than money?

We certainly must be good stewards of all that God has given us: money, time, skills, influence and position. Therefore, generosity and stewardship are about much more, but not less, than our financial resources. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Our heart’s inclination is to worship anything other than God. Giving generously to God’s service can liberate us from our idolatry to materialism and help us fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).

Why does God and or the Church need my money?

This is a great question. The short answer is ‘they don’t.’ God invites us to participate in what He is doing and He desires to share the blessing with us. God certainly does not need our money, He owns it all anyway. In the same way, the Church is run by Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides. God, simply chose money as a means to determine where each believers heart or value is. That said, most churches operating budget comes from the weekly giving of their members and regular attenders. Your giving counts and is greatly appreciated! It allows us to have a facility to serve and train and send disciples out into the community. It allows us to partnership with the God of Mission in Gospel centric ‘missions.’

Should I be giving to my local church, or is it okay to redirect my “tithe” to other ministries?

To cut to the punchline, I don’t believe Christians should give *only* to the local church, but I do believe that Christians should give *first* to their local church. The mission and decisions of any local church should never be economically driven but rather mission and Gospel driven.

In the Old Testament system, the tithe went to the work of God's institution, the temple. Other important things, like funding itinerant rabbis, or providing for the poor, came from giving *beyond* the tithe. The principle there, I think, is that the first fruits of our giving should go to God's *new* institution, the church.

But maybe, you say, the Old Testament is not supposed to set the pattern for our giving. I would agree. In the New Testament, we see the believers (in Acts 2 and Acts 4) giving their money, not to specific projects they were passionate about, but at the feet of the officers they had appointed in the church. And it was *through* the local church that the believers accomplished everything God had called them to.

The local church is God's "Plan A." It's the vehicle through which we care for the poor, feed the hungry, equip people to minister in the community, and send people out to the nations. When we give to the Lord, through the local church, we in fact giving to the God of Mission. The institutional church should lead the way in being generous with its resources.

At Breathe, we have a "one-fund" approach to giving. **All that we give goes to all that we do.** Generally speaking, people don't give to a specific ministry. They are joyfully giving to God of their first fruits and they are trusting the leadership of the Church to carry out the mission of Jesus through the Church.

What the Bible Says about Giving

The Bible contains more than two thousand verses on the subject of Christians and their money. Time and again, the Bible associates our money with our commitment and relationship to the Lord.

What Is Giving?

The word *give* has been defined as "to make a present of." One of the many ways we can give to others is to give financially. Through giving, the early church helped one another and invested in what God was accomplishing. Sadly, the concept of giving has become distorted today. Yet our giving is vitally connected to who we are.

Giving Is an Act of Worship

Giving is a spiritual sacrifice and an expression of love and gratitude, because everything we have comes from God (see 1 Chronicles 29:14). Some people say, "I can't afford to give!" In reality, we can't afford not to give. David said that he will not give to the Lord that which cost him nothing (see 2 Samuel 24:24). No matter what we give to God, what is left will always sustain us better than if we hadn't given at all.

Giving Is a Test of Our Faithfulness

The way we give indicates a great deal about our spirituality. Our giving reveals our value system. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). God does not ask us to give because He needs our resources. Rather, He challenges us to make Him the focus of our lives instead of our money and possessions. We say often, 'show me your calendar and your checkbook and I will tell you what you value most.'

Biblical Principles for Giving

Although the Apostle Paul never overemphasized the subject of giving, he never neglected its importance either. In 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, we find specific guidelines for giving: it is to be a universal practice for believers; it is to be done regularly; it is a personal act; and it is something we should be prepared to do. As we give, God will meet our needs and prosper us (see 2 Corinthians 9:6–10).

Motives for Giving

God promises to bless us if we have the right attitude toward giving (see Luke 6:38; Proverbs 3:9–10). However, some people give with the wrong motives. They may give in an attempt to manipulate God, to relieve guilt, to increase self-worth, to achieve recognition, to obtain power, or to gain tax advantages.

However, the Bible instructs us to “let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). The motives that God desires for our giving are to express our love to Him, please Him, lay up treasures in Heaven, and help reach the world for Jesus Christ.

The Principal of Tithing

Old Testament law required God’s people to give ten percent of their income, which could include flocks, herds, or crops. This ten percent was known as a tithe. In addition to the tithe, God’s people were required to give offerings to the Lord for the care of the temple and the salaries of the priests. In the days of Israel, tithing was not voluntary giving. It was demanded as a form of taxation.

Is tithing for today? Dr. J. B. Gabrell made this observation: “It is unthinkable from the standpoint of the cross that anyone would give less under grace than the Jews gave under law.” God makes an incredible promise to those who give to His work. He will “open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10–11).

Your generosity, stewardship and giving is between you and the Lord. When we give our time, talent and treasure to God, we are investing in something eternal. We have ‘no control’ over how it is used. God will hold those who oversee any Church’s finances accountable. As believers, we are simply responsible for our own actions.

Remember, whatever percentage we choose to give is not what belongs to God. It ALL belongs to God. The first part is all that He asks us to be faithful with as we support His plan...the Church.

Happy Giving! God loves a ‘cheerful/joyful giver.’

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE AS YOU CONSIDER WHAT YOU WILL GIVE TO GOD

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

2 Corinthians 9:6,7 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 8:9-15. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

James 1:17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

1 Corinthians 16:12. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Matthew 25:14-30 “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. ...

Malachi 3:10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

1 Chronicles 29:14 “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.

Leviticus 27:30 “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord.

Titus 3:8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

Romans 12:8 The one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Proverbs 3:9-10 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Matthew 6:2 “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

2 Corinthians 8:1-24 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ...

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Luke 3:11 And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

Matthew 6:1-4 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Luke 16:1 He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

Psalms 24:1 The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Luke 12:13-21 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'"

Malachi 3:6-10 "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Personal Note: This list of verses is simply for you to consider. If God has entrusted to you time, talent and treasure, He will hold you accountable. Your giving is between you and God. Pray. Ask God what He wants you to give. Listen. Then Obey. Many say, 'you cannot outgive God.' This has truly been my experience. It has been an honor throughout my life to be generous in my first fruits generosity. This was instilled into my heart and mind as a child, and I have always been faithful to the teaching of Generosity and Giving found in the pages of the Bible.