

Mark 12:41-44; Leviticus 27:30-33
“Defined by Generosity”

*Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;
 others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.
 A generous person will be enriched,
 and one who gives water will get water. (Proverbs 11:24-25)*

I. Let’s begin with A Theological Foundation for a Generous Life

A. We are Created to Be Generous but we’re Tempted to Hoard

God created us with a willingness to give – to give to God and to give to others. This “design” is part of our makeup; we actually have the *need* to be generous. In fact, generosity helps to fulfill who we are in Christ! Yet there are two voices that oppose our God-given impulse toward generosity, tempting us to keep or hoard what we have.

1. The first is: The voice of fear.

Fear of what might happen if we *give* keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. Aren’t you familiar with that “fear” that we could give too much – and not save enough for emergencies? We might not save enough for retirement?

This fear comes from mistaken ideas about the true source of our security and blessings. The truth is that holding or accumulating offers no real security in this world.

2. The second argument to oppose the spirit of generosity is: The voice of self-gratification.

Our culture tells us that our lives consist in the *abundance* of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, *If I give ...there won’t be enough left for me to enjoy!*

Let me tell you a story: Two wealthy Christians joined a group that was going around the world. Before they started, their minister asked them to observe and to remember any unusual and interesting things they might see in the missionary countries through which they traveled. The men, without thinking too much about it, promised to do so. In Korea one day they saw in the field by the side of the road a boy pulling a crude plow, while an old man held the handles and directed it. One of the Christians thought it was a humorous scene and snapped a picture.

“That’s a curious picture! I suppose they are very poor,” he said to the missionary who was the interpreter and guide. “Yes,” was the reply, “that is the family of Chi Noui. When the church was being built they were eager to give something to it, but they had no money. They sold their only ox and gave the money to the church. This spring they are pulling the plow themselves.”

The two Christians were quiet for several minutes. Then one said, “That must have been a real sacrifice.” But the missionary said, “They did not call it that. They thought it was fortunate they had an ox to sell.”

A poor widow dropped in two small coins... Jesus called His disciples and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.”

B. Defeating the Voices

How do we defeat the “voices” of opposition?

When we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ, when we follow Him as Lord, and begin to understand the majesty of God in our life, we find that our fears decrease and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for the people He cares about.

Some of you may think that’s a ridiculous way to live. And you look around at great Christians you know, the saints who live among us, and you don’t see any of them taking vows of poverty and giving their all to the Church or to charity.

But I don’t believe “poverty” is the place where the Bible is speaking to us today.

We’re talking about faith! We’re talking about trusting God! We’re talking about taking the message about God in this book (the Bible) – and believing it!

Although we still may wrestle with the arguing voices of self-centeredness from time to time, we are able to silence them more quickly and effectively the more we grow in Christ. And the more we grow in Christ, realizing that our lives belong to Him, the more generous we become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth comes from our love for God and our obedience to God!

In the old movie “*Shenandoah*,” Jimmy Stewart plays a proud and bitter farmer and head of a family during the Civil War. In one scene, he sits at the head of the table, with his family gathered before the food. He prays something like this: “Lord, we cleared the land, plowed it, sowed the seed, weeded, harvested, and prepared the meal. We did all the work – I reckon, though, we ought to give You thanks just the same. Amen.”

Aren’t we familiar with the cynical voice of self-gratification? Don’t we applaud ourselves for the personal achievements we experience?

I think there’s some good pride with a job well done. But selfishness can be a rejection of God and all that He represents. When we ask, “What good does it do to serve God?” we’re really asking, “What good does it do me?” Our focus is selfish.

As a Christian I want to put God first in my life, because God has saved a place for me at His banquet table! God is filling my life with a greater sense of confidence in things that are unseen – and I am taking delight in Him! In fact, the Bible says, “Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart!” (Psalm 37:4)

C. As we continue to look at some **Biblical Reasons to Give to God and Others...**

1. ...The Bible has something interesting to say about giving and sharing and serving: **For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.** (Ephesians 2:10)

What are you?

You are the masterpiece of God’s creation! You are the pinnacle and the purpose of His design! When God created the heavens and the earth – He had you in mind! Everything that was created was made for you to enjoy! He gave mankind dominion over all that He made! You are God’s masterpiece with a purpose!

Surely God will take care of you and me as we do the “good things” He planned for us a long time ago! In Jeremiah 29:11, God says: **“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

When we do that for which we were designed, we live into the peace and joy God desires

to give!

Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive!” and you’ve all experienced that with Christmas gift-giving! You take pleasure in pleasing your child or your partner with a *surprise* selected especially for them! But let’s keep in mind, too, that there are gifts you provide with your giving through Church that energizes the testimony of God’s grace and love to more than we can number or name!

2. Matthew 16:24-25 (NLT) **Jesus said to His disciples, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow Me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake, you will save it.”** Jesus *promises* that if you give your life to Him you will never regret it! He is a sin-purger and a life-giver!

3. The Bible tells us over and over that life is a gift, and everything belongs to God. (Psalm 24:1) **The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him.**

D. So let’s look now at **Biblical Guidelines for Giving.**

What’s expected?

From the early days of the Old Testament, God’s people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best of what they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the *first fruits* or the *tithe*, and it equaled one-tenth of one’s flocks or crops or income. Our giving acknowledges our belief that God is the One who provides! He is the One who blesses! Let’s read what the Bible teaches about tithing, or giving 10%.

READING Leviticus 27:30-33

³⁰“One tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD and must be set apart to Him as holy. ³¹If you want to buy back the LORD’s tenth of the grain or fruit, you must pay its value, plus 20 percent. ³²Count off every tenth animal from your herds and flocks and set them apart for the LORD as holy. ³³You may not pick and choose between good and bad animals, and you may not substitute one for another. But if you do exchange one animal for another, then both the original animal and its substitute will be considered holy and cannot be bought back.”

³⁴These are the commands that the LORD gave through Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites.

1. Giving a tithe.

Tithing is a clear way to demonstrate our priorities. The Bible makes the purpose of tithing very clear – to honor God as Lord in our life. We are to give God the first and best of what we earn. For example, what we do first with our money shows what we value most. Giving the first part of our paycheck to God focuses our attention on Him. It is a gift of gratitude for what God provides!

Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you can’t tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are, and if you’re sincere in honoring God, He will teach you how to make adjustments to become more and more generous.

2. Giving beyond the tithe.

Now tithing is a floor for our giving; it's the beginning place, not a ceiling. God calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We can plan to sacrifice a greater percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects and ministries of the Church, capital improvements, or other nonprofit organizations.

II. What Does Our Giving Mean to God?

A. How Does Our Giving Affect God?

From the earliest biblical times, the primary way people worshiped God was by building an altar and offering the fruit of their labors on the altar to God. They would burn the sacrifice of an animal or grain as a way of expressing their gratitude and devotion to honor God. The scent of the burnt offering was said to be a pleasing aroma to God. It wasn't that God loved the smell of burnt meat and grain. But here's a KEY point today: God saw that people were giving a gift that expressed love, faith, and the desire to please and honor Him as Lord of their lives; and this moved God's heart. When given in this spirit, our offerings bless the Lord.

B. What is God's response to our giving?

Luke 6:38 (NLT) Jesus said, **“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full – pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”**

Your giving doesn't go unnoticed by God! He intends to take care of you! Believing that, we give with an attitude of thanksgiving; an attitude of faith, believing that our offering will serve as “blessing” as it meets the needs of others around us!

III. Finally, let's look at How Our Generosity Affects Us

A. Through Generosity Our Hearts Are Changed

When we are generous – to God, to our families, and to others who are in need – the Spirit of God living in us fills our hearts with joy. The heart swells with joy by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous.

B. With Generosity We Find the Blessings of God

Some Christians have the wrong idea behind their giving. They say that if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that shouldn't be the motivation behind our giving – as though we're playing the lottery, giving in order to get more back! The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back our way. Of course, there is no guarantee that if you tithe you will never lose your job or never have other bad things happen to you. Nevertheless, when we give generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.

Teach the Card: Today I want you to look at the insert card “Personal Goals and Commitment.” In terms of spiritual stewardship, we are being asked to change our habits from the ways of the world so that we creating a relationship with the Lord and Savior of our lives! Here is a tool you can use to remind yourself how God is calling you to Himself through time in prayer, in His word, and with your income.

The next piece is the “Weekly Giving Guide.” I find this information helpful for those who want some quick help figuring the level at which they are currently giving.

1. Highlighted is the monthly income: \$2,500.
2. Now have in mind what your level of giving is **on a weekly basis**. And if you give once a month, you can figure that out to a weekly number.
3. Compare what level you are in your giving with your annual, monthly, or weekly income.
3. If you move to the right – you see the columns representing different numbers **based on weekly figures**. [Weekly] 4%, 10%, up to 15%
5. So if my annual income is \$30,000 and I'm giving around \$25 / week to the Church, I see that I may want to step up 2% or 4% more for the year to come.

The question isn't, what are you doing for a living? The deeper issue is, what are you doing with your life? Why did God put you here on the earth? "To do the good things He planned for you long ago." God is moving you beyond a career orientation to a mission focus.

Our stewardship emphasis, "*Enough!*" asks us how we're doing managing God's money? Let me encourage you to spend some time addressing His portfolio this week.

Personal Goals and Commitment

"Enough" Stewardship Campaign:

During the past few weeks we have looked at our own spending, saving, and giving habits. We have examined the biblical principles of financial management, and we have learned about ways to assess our financial situation and develop a financial plan that will allow us to experience the true joy that comes through simplicity and generosity. Now, on this Consecration Sunday, I ask God's blessing of my commitment to these financial goals for the upcoming year.

My Personal Goals and Commitment for 2018

1. I will thank God daily for all my blessings. My goal for daily Bible reading and prayer is _____ days each week.
2. I will seek contentment and simplicity and live within my means.
My spending goal is _____.
3. I will seek freedom from the bonds of credit and debt.
My debt reduction goal is _____.
4. I will seek to wisely manage the gifts God has given me, investing and saving for the future.
My saving goal is _____.
5. I will worship God each week by giving my tithes and offerings. My estimate of giving for 2018 is _____.

Lord, I present this commitment to You, acknowledging that everything I have and everything I am is a gift from You. I pray that You will grant me wisdom and strength in the coming year, and that You will bless and use the gifts that I humbly present to You. Amen.

For personal use. Place in your Bible for reference in the coming year.