

Worth Thinking About....

Are you comfortable talking about money? The teacher of a particular adult Sunday School class was. I know because I was there, and I've never forgotten though it was decades ago.

I'll give you just a few details. I was not a member, but knew the church fairly well. This was a good-sized congregation, and had many committed and gifted members. Their economic status ranged from rather poor to quite wealthy. Most were in the middle class. The church had a healthy budget. But our teacher, a retired seminary professor, wanted to challenge us.

"What would happen," he asked, "if every family in the congregation were to be reduced to a welfare income, but were to *tithe*?" Well, as a matter of fact he had done the calculations. On this scenario, the church budget would *increase*. Some class members pushed back a little. But the teacher had made his point.

I suppose I should pause here to explain a few things, starting with – what does it mean to "tithe"? Well, it means great blessing for the one who does it!

A more academic answer is that tithing is giving God 10% of one's income. The idea comes from the Old Testament, where it was expected of all God's people. The New Testament teaching is harder to pin down. Some Christians (I am not one of them) believe it is still required of believers. Some congregations (ours is not one of them) require tithing as a condition for membership. My own belief is that in the New Testament, tithing is not required – but generosity is lifted up, not just as a virtue but as a source of blessing. Here's another way of saying it: I believe Christians don't *have* to tithe – but praise God, we *get to*!

In the Old Testament book of Malachi, God (speaking through the prophet) challenges people: "Bring the full tithes...try me, and see if I don't open the windows of heaven and pour out blessing" (Malachi 3:10, slightly paraphrased).

I have found that it is so. Even when I was among the working poor (sub-welfare income for awhile there), tithing was *never* a burden. Ever! We've had easy times and hard times, but we've always had enough and have felt our lives were very rich.

Now how would my old teacher's experiment work for an average small congregation? Well, I can't account for every variable. But just for fun, I took the "federal poverty guidelines" for a household of two (\$15,930), multiplied by the number of giving units (in this case 58), figured the tithe and came up with \$92,394, an amount substantially higher than the average small congregation's budget

So the church council might have a lot easier time working out the bills if we all were reduced to poverty – but tithed.

I don't doubt that a statistical purist could poke holes in my scenario and figures. And I hope I've already made it clear that I don't think tithing is required of Christians. (Remember, we don't *have* to but we *get to*.)

But it's worth thinking about, isn't it?

- Rev. Douglas Norquist
Community Lutheran Church,
Palmer/Suomi
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Why God Gives to Us

Giving is a natural expression of love. Friends do it. Lovers do it. Parents do it. Even children do it. We give presents to those we love.

The Bible says that “God gives to all mortals life and breath and all things,” so that “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:25, 28). A psalmist says, “O, Lord how manifold are your works!...The earth is full of your creatures...They all look to you to give them their food in due season...When you open your hands, they are filled with good things” (Psalm 104:27-28). Jesus says that the Father in heaven gives “good things to those who ask him” (Matthew 7:11).

The word for this “giving” is **grace**. Jesus gives his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Eternal life is a gift of God (Romans 6:23). So is the faith necessary to receive it (Ephesians 2:8).



Why does God give these things to us? Because God love us and there is an intrinsic connection between giving and live. Perhaps the best known verse of the Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave...” (John 3:16).

God gives because God loves. God gives to *us* because God loves *us*. And when we give our offerings to God as an act of worship we reflect that love. We love God back.

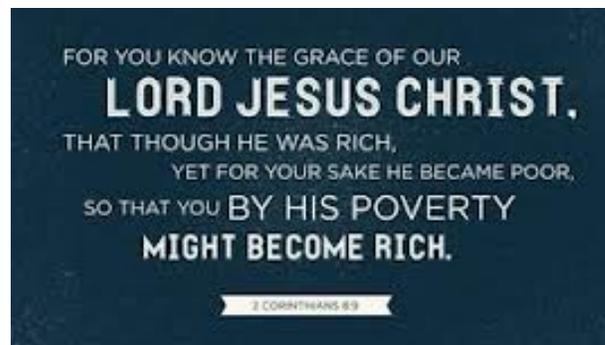


There comes a day when we understand that all is of grace, that the whole world is a gift of God, a completely generous gift. We see each flower, each drop of water, each minute of our life as a gift of God. He gives them to all, both to those who know him and to those who are ignorant of Him.

- Paul Tournier, *Meaning of Gifts*
(Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 59

Stewardship Principles from the Letters of Paul

- ❖ Giving is both a duty and a delight, something we ought to do and something we are pleased to do (Romans 15:25-26).
- ❖ Giving is to be regular and systematic, according to a plan (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- ❖ Giving is a demonstration of God's grace (2 Corinthians 8:1; 9:14).
- ❖ Giving need not be hampered by difficult circumstances, for even those who suffer affliction and experience poverty may exhibit generosity (2 Corinthians 8:2).
- ❖ Giving is to be voluntary, not under compulsion (2 Corinthians 8:3; 9:5, 7).
- ❖ Giving should be proportionate to one's income and circumstances, as each is expected to contribute according to his or her means (2 Corinthians 8:3, 11-13).
- ❖ Giving can also be undertaken as a sacrifice, as some will feel inspired to give "beyond their means" (2 Corinthians 8:3).
- ❖ Giving is a privilege, something we appreciate being able to do as a result of God's grace (2 Corinthians 8:4).
- ❖ Giving involves more than financial contributions – we first commit *ourselves* to the Lord and to the church at large (2 Corinthians 8:5).
- ❖ Giving is a witness to the gospel, demonstrating the genuineness of the church's love (2 Corinthians 8:8, 24).
- ❖ Giving may involve making a pledge that the giver is committed to fulfilling over time (2 Corinthians 8:10-11).
- ❖ Giving is to represent a personal commitment – each person is to make up his or her own mind how much to give (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- ❖ Giving is not to be undertaken reluctantly but cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- ❖ Giving is conducted in faith that God will provide for those who give (2 Corinthians 9:8-11).
- ❖ Giving brings glory to God and leads people to give thanks to God (2 Corinthians 9:11-13).



Giving In An Age of Affluence: How Much Do We Need?

DO ALL YOU CAN
DO ALL THE GOOD YOU CAN,
BY ALL THE MEANS YOU CAN,
IN ALL THE WAYS YOU CAN,
IN ALL THE PLACES YOU CAN,
AT ALL THE TIMES YOU CAN,
TO ALL THE PEOPLE YOU CAN,
AS LONG AS EVER YOU CAN.
-JOHN WESLEY

As a young man, John Wesley reportedly earned thirty pounds at his first job; he kept 28 pounds, and gave two away. Later, when his salary had doubled, he still kept 28 pounds but now gave 32 away. Eventually, he was earning 120 pounds, still living on 28 and giving away the rest. Wesley's motto regarding finances was, "Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

Many Christians today live in affluence, possessing far more than they need. Prosperity is a good thing, but we must weigh our surplus against the needs of those who are in want. John Westerhoff says that when he considers the needs of the poor compared to his own relative affluence, the question becomes not "What do I need to give?" but "What do I have a right to keep?"

Jesus tells a parable of a rich man who dresses in purple linen and dines sumptuously while a poor beggar lies at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). The point is not that there is anything sinful about eating good food and wearing nice clothes, but to do so without a care for the one in rags and hunger is simply perverse (on this, see also James 2:15-17).

Jesus says that this rich man would have known better if he had "listened to Moses and the prophets." Moses said to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). The prophets got more specific, rebuking those who lived in luxury while others dwelt in poverty (Amos 6:1-6).

What should Christians do? Those who are affluent must listen to Moses and the prophets and to Jesus as well. They must search individually and as communities for the balance between enjoying the material blessings God has bestowed and sharing this bounty with the neighbors they are called to love.

Each must make up his or her own mind (2 Corinthians 9:7), but this advice from scripture may guide them:

"As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life." (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Stewardship and the Younger Generation

1. According to Mark Rusert, there are three indispensable qualities younger generations seek in a church community. They are:
 - a. Authenticity, compassion and self-sustainability
 - b. Selfishness, perfectionism, judgmentalism
 - c. Innovation, independence and intelligence

Answer:

- a – Rusert asserts that if we work to create and maintain the following truths, these qualities help develop the trust necessary for self-giving:
- 1) All that we have is God's
 - 2) If all that we have is God's, then what we do in every area of our lives matters.
 - 3) God has been compassionate to us and so we are called to be compassionate to others – to be water in the desert, bringing new life to dead places.
 - 4) What we need to love and serve others is what God has already provided us.

Read more of Rusert's article at the Center for Stewardship Leaders on the Luther Seminary website (www.luthersem.edu)

Financial Discipleship



“I’d like to give more to the church, but I just can’t afford it.” For some people that may be true. For most of us there’s another reason – our choices. We make choices about how to use our money. We choose to meet more personal wants or we choose to share more with others. Whether we turn more of our resources in on ourselves or outward toward others depends on two qualities: a desire to show concern for people with more

than words, and a responsible disciple for managing money. The desire to share with others flows from a Christian commitment. The key to financial discipleship is to get our sharing with others and our spending on ourselves into the right order of priority. If we spend first, we won’t have much left to share. If we share first, we’ll manage to live on the rest. “I’d like to give more to the church, and I will.”

How much of YOU do you put in your church envelope?
The specific amount isn’t important. How much of YOU do you put in as a representation of your love and thanksgiving - as a sacrifice?

Only in doing, can we give example. Christians practice stewardship by sharing with those in need their God-given time, talents, and treasures, as an act of thanks to God for all God’s gifts to them.

