



Sacred City Church

A Biblical Guideline for Giving

The Bible begins its epic narrative with God. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). God is the main character. The whole story is about him, and everything belongs to him.

Psalms 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...”

And yet, as soon as God created humans, who alone bear his image, he delegates authority to them, giving them the responsibility of stewarding everything on the planet. It all belongs to him, but he asks them to “fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over...every living thing...” (Genesis 1:28).

A key aspect of our role as God’s stewards is managing the financial resources he has entrusted to us. Jesus, who often talked about money, said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21). As disciples of Jesus, the way we handle our money is a primary indicator of the health of our affections for him.

Generous giving is one particular aspect of financial stewardship in which many people struggle. The material below is intended to serve as a kind of generous giving FAQ resource for the Sacred City family.

Consider the following questions. Some are answered clearly in the scriptures. Others require the Holy Spirit’s guidance. When wrestling with these questions, ask the Holy Spirit to speak clearly, then check what you are hearing with the Bible and with your community to seek confirmation.

As disciples who want to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” (2 Peter 3:18), we should always be wrestling with these issues. God has entrusted his resources to us, and our job is to manage them well.

Should I give?

The Bible makes it clear that all followers of Jesus are to give, to share their financial resources. In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

According to Jesus, there’s a way to spend our money now that will have eternal implications! The only way to obey Jesus’ command to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” is to give.

In 2 Corinthians 9:68, Paul writes, “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. And God is able to make all

grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

In this passage, after reminding the Corinthians of the old adage, “you reap what you sow,” and applying it specifically to giving, Paul assures them that God will graciously meet their needs so that they will have enough to give (“abound in every good work”). The reason God provides for us is so we can give.

And finally, Ephesians 4:28 makes it clear that one of the main reasons a person works to earn money is so that they will have something to give to others. “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.”

Why should I give?

This is the most important question on this list! Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their external conformity to the Law’s demands, while lacking a generous and merciful heart.

Matthew 23:23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

While making it clear that we should give, the Bible also clearly states the reason we are to give.

First of all, as has already been mentioned, everything we have belongs to God, and we are merely his stewards, his managers. The financial resources we have are not ours, so we are not the ones who make the final call on how to utilize them. This notion of us being mere stewards of God’s resources clearly challenges our sinful desire to live for ourselves, and to our own master.

Secondly, the good news of the gospel tells us that because of our sin and rebellion against God, because of our desire to use God’s things to advance our own agenda, we are broken and in need of a savior. The reality is that we have viewed money as a thing that would give us security, significance, satisfaction. We have made it a god, and rejected the One True God. Because of our sin, we deserve death (Romans 6:23), and there’s nothing we can do, including giving our money, to save ourselves (Ephesians 2:89). We do not give as a way to “make up” for our sin! We cannot atone for our misuse of money simply by changing the way we use it! We could never repay the “debt” we owe God because of our rebellion against him. (See Matthew 18:21-35.)

But purely because of his grace and love, Jesus Christ willingly came to earth and laid down his life for us so we could be forgiven and adopted into the Father’s family (Galatians 2:20)! When Jesus died on the cross, he was separated from the Father, becoming spiritually bankrupt, all so that our sins could be forgiven, and we could become spiritually wealthy, possessing “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 1:3). The greatest spiritual blessing we possess is the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). We have “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4)! Jesus not only gave his life FOR us, he gives his life TO us through his Spirit. Jesus now becomes our source of security, significance, and satisfaction. We are released from viewing money as a god, and free to use it as a resource to bless others.

Paul sums it up this way in 2 Corinthians 8:9: “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.”

Jesus showed radical sacrifice and generosity in giving his life for us and to us! He gave up his place in the Father's family (though only temporarily, as he rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father!), so that we could be included in the Father's family! What greater motivation could we have to give generously?!

If stewardship is a motive for giving (it's all God's, and I want to obey him), the gospel provides a much more powerful motive (Jesus gave his life to save me, and I want to give generously in response)! Giving is a simple way of affirming that we believe the gospel, that we are sinners who have been saved purely by the generous grace of God.

What priority should giving have?

The Bible is clear that followers of Jesus should make giving a priority. We should give first, then steward the remaining resources as the Spirit leads us.

The practice of "first fruits" giving was a key principle for God's people, Israel. Exodus 23:19 "The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God."

Proverbs 3:9, "Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce."

By giving the first part of everything to him, grain, olive oil, wine, sheep, cattle, donkeys, etc. the Israelites demonstrated faith in two ways: they believed everything belonged to God, so he got the first part (which was seen as the best part); and they believed that God would provide the rest so their needs would be met. (See Numbers 18:12-13 and Deuteronomy 18:15).

Paul encourages a similar practice for the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 16:2, "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."

The Bible teaches that giving is the top priority for us as stewards of God's resources. The first thing we should do with the money we receive is give it away.

How much should I give?

While the Bible provides a few general guidelines, followers of Jesus need to determine the specific amount that the Holy Spirit is leading them to give.

In the Old Testament, God's people were instructed to bring the first fruits of everything (crops, herds, etc.) (Numbers 18:12-13); offer sacrifices (Numbers 18); pay two different tithes, which were 10% of their "income" (Numbers 18, Deuteronomy 14); celebrate 3 annual feasts (Deuteronomy 16); offer freewill offerings (Exodus 35:20-29, Leviticus 22:17-22); observe a Sabbath year every 7 years (Leviticus 25); and leave produce in the field for the poor (Deuteronomy 24). **All of this added up to between 25% and 35% of their income!**

The New Testament provides a handful of key guidelines that help us determine the specific amount we will give. Three of these principles are found in 2 Corinthians 9:6-11:

"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. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, 'He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will

supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God."

Principle #1: Give Generously

By quoting the old adage, "you reap what you sow," in the context of giving, Paul is clearly saying that we are to give "bountifully." Later in the passage, he specifically says "you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way..." When determining how much we should give, the amount should be generous.

Principle #2: Give Deliberately

In this passage, Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church to begin preparing a gift for the poverty stricken church in Macedonia. The Corinthians had expressed a desire to help meet this need, but Paul wanted them to be deliberate in their preparation. He knew this would prevent people from feeling compelled to give. To say it another way, Paul didn't want people to give because they felt guilty. He wanted them to give because they were led by the Spirit to give a specific amount prior to his arrival. This is why he says, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion..."

We should take the time to prayerfully consider specifically how much we will give. This will help prevent us from reactionary, guilt driven giving, and help us keep our commitments to help fund those in need.

Principle #3: Give Cheerfully

The Greek word translated "cheerful" is "hilaros," from which we get our word "hilarious." God loves it when we are cheerful in our giving, joyful at the opportunity to redirect God's resources to someone else!

The only way we will give generously, deliberately, and cheerfully is if we believe we already have the greatest treasure in the universe, the "pearl of great value" (Matthew 13:45-46), which is Jesus Christ himself. Only then will we see our money as a tool to bless others instead of a god to worship.

With these guidelines in mind, followers of Jesus should pray and ask the Holy Spirit how much he wants them to give. When we consider the first fruits principle, and the instructions of 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 9:7, it seems best to determine a percentage that you will give each time you receive income. Another approach might be to ask the Holy Spirit how much he wants you to give over a specific amount of time (month, year, etc.).

When we take the weight of the biblical evidence in mind it seems that 10% should be the foundation and bare minimum that we are giving back to God. If the Old Testament saints gave so generously

under the old covenant, shouldn't our hearts direct us to give at least as generously under the new and better covenant of grace?

Who should I give to?

The Bible provides much helpful guidance in answer to this question.

In the Old Testament, two clear priorities emerge as we consider all of the different gifts and offerings God's people were commanded to give. The first is the support of the centralized worship structure, including the ongoing support of the priests and Levites, as well as the orchestration of the 3 annual festivals and the building of the tabernacle and the temple

facilities. The first fruit offerings, the two tithes, the freewill offerings, and the entire sacrificial system funded Israel's worship structure.

The second priority is the care and support of the poor, especially widows and orphans. The Israelites were commanded to leave produce in their fields so the poor could "glean," providing them with an ongoing source of food. Widows and orphans were included in the annual festivals without bringing a contribution. And every third year, the second tithe was given to widows and orphans.

We see these same two priorities emerge in the New Testament. The first priority for our giving is to support our local church.

Acts 4:32-35

"Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

Note that the early church brought their money to the apostles, laying it at their feet so they could distribute it. Clearly, they distributed the money to the poor, but the funds were centralized first, then distributed. We have a responsibility to give to our local church, as well as to give directly to the poor.

In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, Paul is defending his apostleship and arguing that he and Barnabas have a right to be financially supported by the church in Corinth.

"Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

He draws a clear line from the priests who derived their support from the Old Testament sacrificial system and New Testament church leaders who should derive their support from those who they are serving.

Paul echoes this thinking in Galatians 6:6-7, repeating the reap/sow principle: "One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."

Finally, in 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Paul speaks explicitly about funding elders who lead, teach, and preach.

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

The point here is to view the work that elders do as real work, actual labor, which, like any job, requires payment. “The laborer deserves his wages.” The quote about the ox is from Deuteronomy 25:4, which he also quoted in 1 Corinthians 9:9-11, where he adds, “Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the

crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?”

All of this makes it clear that, as was true in the Old Testament, the people of God are responsible to fund the people, systems, and structures that make corporate worship possible. As the church, we are equipped and sent to be the people of God in all of life. Worship doesn't just happen in a building on Sunday morning, but throughout the week in every place. We, as people indwelt with the Holy Spirit, are now a temple of the living God (Ephesians 2:21-22). Ephesians 4:11-13 places a large emphasis on the importance of the saints being equipped to do the work of ministry in all of life, and that work must be funded. Additionally, the local church has a responsibility to redistribute funds to the needy in their church family (Acts 4:32-35) and to help fund other leaders who are starting new churches in other places (Philippians 4:14-20).

The second priority for our giving is to help meet the needs of the poor.

Acts 2:44-45 describes the life of the early church, where resources were shared and everyone's needs were met. “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

James 2:15-16 presents this challenging question: “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”

And John equates the sharing of our resources with loving one another.

1 John 3:16-18

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

All of these passages make it clear that as individual followers of Jesus, we have a responsibility to share our money with those who are poor, particularly with other believers who are in need.

How do I decide which needs to meet?

This question is generally answered in the Bible, but requires the ongoing leadership of the Holy Spirit. Other than the question, “Why should I give?,” this is the most difficult question to answer

because there are so many worthy causes to consider, and so much need around us in our church community and in our city.

If the above analysis of the New Testament's giving priorities is accurate, then it follows that the largest part of our giving should go to our local church, while a separate portion of our giving should be designated for helping meet the needs of the poor.

For example, if the Holy Spirit leads a person to give 14% of their income, they would then determine how to split those funds between these two New Testament priorities. The Holy Spirit may lead them to give 10% to their local church, and 4% to helping meet the needs of the poor. (Many followers of Jesus follow the church's example and help fund other leaders who are starting new churches in other places. This is also a very worthy investment of God's resources).

Once these numbers are prayerfully discerned, the hard work of determining where to allocate the funds begins. There are countless local and international organizations who help meet the needs of the poor. There are ongoing practical needs that arise within our church family.

Leaders are being sent out to start new churches all over the world. As each opportunity arises, ask the Holy Spirit if he is leading you to give. Often, you will have already made other commitments that will make it impossible for you to give. At other times, the Holy Spirit might ask you to sell something or give something up in order to meet a need. Once again, our community should play an essential role in helping determine the leading of the Spirit in our lives.

As a church family, we have often been reminded that we should not let the need alone determine where we should give, but rather, let the leading of the Holy Spirit determine where we should give. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 9:7 come to mind again: "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

What are some practical ways to meet these needs?

These are merely some suggestions, but are ideas that have proven to be effective for many people, and which are in line with the overall concept of wise stewardship.

After the Holy Spirit makes it clear how much you are to give, and how you are to split those funds between the local church and helping meet the needs of the poor (or possibly helping fund leaders who are establishing new churches in other places), it can be helpful to set up a special account where funds can be deposited regularly, and then withdrawn as needs arise. This allows you to follow a first fruits approach in the deliberate setting aside of money, and also gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to guide you through the maze of giving opportunities that arise. Even with a small account, it is a joy to be able to prayerfully consider a need when the money is already set aside!

Another way the Spirit sometimes leads people to give to special needs that arise is to take the money out of their regular budget. For example, if a person in your missional community needs grocery money, and you do not have an auxiliary fund with money in it to help meet this need, the Spirit may lead you to give \$50 of your allotted grocery money for the month. What an opportunity to share with someone in need, and to trust our Father to meet your needs!

Final Thoughts

We fall into the trap of believing that money will provide us with a measure of security, significance, and satisfaction. We believe that if we had just a little bit more, then we'd be content.

Paul concludes his letter to Timothy, a young church leader, with some encouraging and sobering words about money (1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19):

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness... As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in

good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

Jesus is offering us that which is truly life. Because we already have the greatest treasure, we are free to generously give the treasure he's entrusted to us. We have no fear of losing out on life, but rather, we can rest knowing that we have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.