

Moving from Membership to Discipleship: Giving
Exodus 35:20-29, 36:3-7
October 30, 2016

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord. Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or hides of sea cows brought them. Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an offering to the Lord, and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work brought it. Every skilled woman spun with her hands and brought what she had spun—blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen. And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair. The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do. They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

Today we reach the end of our sermon series on the six disciplines of the Christian life. We have covered Bible study, prayer, worship, serving, witnessing, and today we come to the big one. Today we will take a look at the Christian discipline of giving.

Money is always a dangerous topic for a pastor. If you talk too much about money, people will think that's all you care about. If you talk too little about money, the people won't have any guidelines on which to base their offerings to the Lord. The solution to this problem is for the pastor to bow out of the conversation. I'm not going to stand here and tell you what I think about giving. Instead, I'm going to tell you what God says about giving.

Only by looking at our offerings from God's perspective can we gain a proper perspective on giving. When we understand what God has to say, we can clear up any misunderstandings we have about why we should give, how much we should give, what our attitude should be about giving, and what benefits we receive from our giving.

If I ask you, "Why should I give?" many of you might come up with the easy answer, "Because God says so." And that is a proper answer. However, it's also the pat answer and I told you in the message about serving that I don't care for the pat answer, the easy answer. If you say we should give because God says so, you're right but that

doesn't go deep enough to really answer the human question.

The real answer to, "Why should I give?" isn't at all about money. Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. Here's a news flash – God doesn't care about money. What possible use could God have for money? Think about this. If God cared about money, he could fill this sanctuary with \$1000 bills. If God cared so much about money, we could all stop our giving and let God supply his church with everything it needs.

But it doesn't work that way, does it? Why not? Because the whole concept of our offerings to God has nothing to do with money. The factors that do play into our giving are love and trust. Love is a factor because, let's face it, don't we normally give the most to the ones we love the most. (Not including the IRS.) Isn't our gift always directly proportionate to our love? Who gets the more expensive Christmas present – your neighbor or your child? And who should we love more than the Lord?

I'll stop here to explain something. I'm not trying to make anyone feel guilty. I'm not trying to pressure anyone into increasing their offering. I'm simply telling you the facts. And the fact is, your love will control your wallet. Ideally, when a Christian gives his offering to the Lord, he should be able to say to God, without shame, "I love you this much."

The other factor of why we should give is trust. God wants us to present generous offerings to him as a matter of trust. Sacrificial giving forces us to look to God for all our needs. Today's reading from Malachi is the only place in the Bible where God tells us to put his promises to the test. Listen carefully: *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse . . . test me in this . . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it* (Mal 3:10 NIV).

The simple fact is this. You either trust in this promise of God or you don't. Is God promising that you'll receive \$10 for every dollar you give. No. God is saying that your giving will be rewarded with blessings of his choosing, but your giving will be rewarded. This promise from Malachi is proof of that reward.

Jesus reiterated this promise when he told us, that if the birds of the air and the flowers of the field were under his Father's protection, how much more do you think we are under our Father's protection. God promises that we will be supplied with all that we need – not all that we want – but all that we need. Bottom line is we either believe that promise or we don't.

That brings us to how much should we be offering back to God. Our reading from Malachi talks about bringing in the whole tithe. A tithe is one-tenth. In Malachi's time that meant one-tenth of everything. In this day, that would be one-tenth of all we own and earn – before taxes.

But the tithe is Old Testament ceremonial law. It's a good standard for us today but it isn't binding on us today. Christians are free from the rules and regulations of the Old Testament ceremonial law. Now, if you're ready to breathe a sigh of relief, don't do it

just yet.

The faithful of the Old Testament had it easy. God told them exactly what constituted the proper amount to give. We're not so lucky. You see, God allows us to decide for ourselves how much of what we have we want to offer back to him. And, as I said earlier, our offering is the measure of our love and trust.

Now, so we have no misunderstandings, God is not interested in the dollar amounts of our offerings. Those who have more can well afford to give more. God wants what you have not what you don't have.

Take the story of the widow's mites. The widow gave only two pennies. The Pharisees gave thousands of times more. Yet, Jesus said the widow gave more than all the Pharisees because she gave all she had. The amount of your offering isn't how God decides the worth of your offering.

And that brings us to our next point. What should be our attitude about our giving? In the story of the widow's mites, what impressed Jesus, and remember that Jesus is God, what impressed Jesus was the attitude of the widow's gift. The widow was so concerned about her love for God and the work of his house that she was willing to give all she had. Did she love God? She gave it all. Did she trust God? There can be no doubt of her complete trust in God's promise to take care of her. She gave it all.

Another aspect of our attitude on giving is joy. We should be making our offering to the Lord in complete joy. Every picture I've ever seen of the widow's mites shows a kind of timid woman with her head bowed down. But what if she put those two mites in the offering box standing erect with her head held high and a smile on her face? What if she gave her two mites joyfully? This is the feeling we get from today's reading from Exodus.

Moses called on the people to give whatever they felt like giving so the Tabernacle could be built. There were no guidelines set. This was strictly a free-will offering – a free-will offering that got out of hand. The people knew what the Lord had done for them and they were grateful.

God's grace moved the hearts of the people to such love they gave too much. The Bible says the craftsmen came to Moses and complained that the people were giving too much. Can you imagine Kurt Vaaler coming to me and saying, "Pastor, you have to tell the people to cut back on their offerings. I don't know what to do with all this money." We may chuckle, but that's exactly what happened to Moses. Moses had to tell the people to stop giving.

The people in that story gave out of love. The people in that story gave out of joy. And the attitude of our offering should be the same. Those Israelites could look back and see their deliverance from Egypt. They had good reason to be in joyous love for God.

We, on the other hand, can look back and see our deliverance from sin, death, and the

power of Satan. We have good reason to be joyous in our love for God. The deliverance of the Israelites was temporal. Our deliverance is eternal. The joyful attitude of our offering should exceed that of those people. And remember, God is concerned with attitude not amount.

Lastly, we should look at the benefits of giving – there are two. First, our offerings advance the work of the church. That's important. Prince of Peace is here to reach the lost and to tend to the needs of its members. That takes money. It would be nice if it all came free but that's not the way it happens.

It takes money to reach the lost for Christ. But that's not going to stop us. We need to be fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission. We need to move the church forward, especially here in Farmington Hills. This city needs Jesus. We have Jesus. And we need to finance whatever it takes to give this city what we have – what they need – Jesus Christ.

Another benefit of giving is the effect giving has on the giver. To begin with, you can't buy a better seat in heaven. You're going to heaven as a free gift of God, purchased by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Are we clear on that?

But giving does have an effect on the giver. The rule is – you can't out-give God. When you support God's work, God supports you. God says: *see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.* If you come to God with a cup of offering, God will come back to you with a gallon of blessing. If you come to God with a carload of offering, God will come back to you with a trainload of blessing. You can't out-give God. That's not my idea. That's what he said through the prophet Malachi. That's what he said himself with the voice of Jesus.

In summary, we should give because we love and trust God. We should give in proportion to how God has blessed us. We should give joyfully because of all that God has done for us. And we should give expectantly because of God's promise to tend to all the needs of his people. That is the proper Christian perspective on giving.

I hope you noticed that I haven't told you to give more. The reason is that what you offer back to the Lord is between you and the Lord. I just wanted to give you God's perspective on your offering. Next time you're talking to the Lord, bring up the topic of your offering and let his Holy Spirit govern your response.

There you have it. The six disciplines of the Christian life. The Bible is God's love letter to you. Prayer is God's open line of communication so his kids can stay in touch. Worship is our thankful response to all the love God showers on us daily. Serving is God's way to keep us together as a family and the physical way we reach out to the lost with the love of Christ. Witnessing is our number one job as Christians and it's also God's chosen plan for the world to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. And giving is the expression of the love, trust, and joy we feel toward God. Six simple steps to a God-pleasing life. I pray that we all receive such an increase of the Holy Spirit that these

become the disciplines of our Christian lives.