A FIVE-WEEK REFLECTION ON GIVING

Reflections on Christian Life and Money



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Reflections on Christian Life and Money

Jesus taught so often about money because our relationship to it reveals our hearts. Money can promise a security, power, and pleasure that supplants God. Money can also, however, be a spiritual tool—a concrete way to give ourselves to God and his work. Over the next five weeks, I'll consider five questions about money that Scripture speaks to. I hope this prepares us for Stewardship Sunday and, more deeply, shows us the joy of depending on God.

Question 1: Why Do We Give?

Paul begins with **a gift we have already received**: "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" (2 Cor 8:8–9). The Son of God gave us himself to the point of dying for us on a cross. Our giving doesn't purchase his love; it responds to it. When we meditate on what God has already given us, we being to loosen our grip on the things we fear losing.

Paul also compares giving to **sowing seed**: "whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6). A seed kept in a jar remains safe but never grows. A seed placed in the ground is given away in hope of a harvest. When we give to the work of God, we trust him to bring fruit that will outlast us. This isn't a scheme to get rich, but an invitation for real participation in his purposes.

Jesus tells us giving also **trains our hearts** for heaven: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). Our money serves real purposes in this life but cannot secure the next. Christ alone does that.

Even now, however, we can spend our money on eternal joys. Where has fear made you hold tightly to what God entrusted to you? Begin there in prayer. The God who gave you his Son can be trusted with your future and your finances.

Question 2. What Do We Give?

"What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me" (Ps 116:12)? **We don't give to earn** God's grace. **We give in response** to what he's given us: his Son, his Spirit, his Love, his gift of true and eternal Life.

So how should we think about *what* we give?

Our whole lives is the starting point: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice," Paul urges, "holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). If Christ is our Lord, His Lordship extends to our time, work, homes, plans, and possession. The question is therefore larger than "how much of my income I give?" The question is whether or not I have placed *everything* in God's hands.

In the Old Testament, this included the concrete act of giving **ten percent**: "of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you," vowed Jacob (Gen 28:22). The word "tithe" means "tenth," and ten percent of overall income in the course of a year is a helpful goal (or sound baseline) to work toward for many Christians.

Yet, the New Testament does not describe Christian generosity chiefly as "paying God his percentage." Paul calls us to give generously, deliberately, and gladly. David would not bring an offering to the Lord that cost him nothing (2 Sam 24:24). Jesus noticed the widow whose small gift represented a costly act of trust (Mk 12:43-44). These examples invite us to ask, **is *what* I'm giving expressing love for God, dependence on him, and sacrifice for me?**

These questions will land differently for each of us. Some of us may be able to give far beyond a tenth. Others may be facing unemployment, debt, or pressing needs. We should neither turn a useful benchmark into a measure of faith nor use Christian freedom as an excuse to avoid generosity. We need to bring our real circumstances before the Lord and ask what faithful, sacrificial giving looks like now.

As you consider your finances this year, begin with Romans 12:1. Offer yourself to God. Then look honestly at what you earn, spend, save, and give. Our possessions are part of our worship, and our heavenly Father receives the whole life we place before him.

Question 3. Where Do We Give?

There are more needs and causes than we have resources—so how does a Christian decide *where* to give?

Paul's words to the Galatians are instructive: "as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and **especially to those who are of the household of faith**" (Galatians 6:10).

The "**household of faith**" speaks to the work of God in the local church—evidenced by Paul's guidance in verse 6, "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches" (Galatians 6:6). "**Especially**" means "most of all," "to a greater degree," or "above all."

Christian giving, therefore, begins with and prioritizes the local church where we're being discipled, fed, and loved; where we love others in concrete relationships over time; where we engage in mission and good works. Typically, this is where a Christian gives his or her tithe.

But Christian giving has a wide horizon. Like a rock splashing in a pool, giving moves outward in widening circles as God leads us.

Beyond the local congregation, Paul's churches in Gentile lands partnered in giving to Christians in need in Jerusalem. We likewise have opportunities to support **mission work and church planting far beyond our local church.**

And our giving should remain open to the **person in need God may put in front of us**. Like the Good Samaritan, there may be times when we are uniquely positioned to help someone, and we want to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit when that happens.

Thus, while Paul tells us to begin with "the household of faith," let us not forget he also says that "as we have opportunity, let us do good to *everyone*."

As you pray and plan for giving this year, begin locally with your home church, but also keep your eyes open. The Lord uses generosity to advance his work and mission, near and far.

Question 4. When Do We Give?

Giving when we feel moved can express generosity. In Scripture, however, generosity is more often formed through habit. *When* we give, then, involves giving that is *orderly*, *regular* and can *start now*.

Giving was done **orderly** in the Old and New Testaments. People gave at the beginning of harvest season, "the best of the firstfruits" (Exod 23:19), weekly, "on the Sabbath day" (Num 28:9), seasonally, "at the beginning of your months" (Num 28:11), and at high feasts, "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me.... None shall appear before me empty-handed" (Exod 23:14-17).

In the New Testament, Paul institutes a weekly rhythm in Corinth, "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper" (1 Cor 16:2).

Paul's advice is wonderfully practical: Christian giving requires prayerful planning. Choose a time to assess what God has entrusted to you, how much you feel led to give, and where you will give it. Do this at least once a year. If your circumstances change, revisit the plan.

Giving is also done **regularly**. The weekly practice Paul mentions has been commonplace for Christians. However, giving twice monthly or monthly can work, too. The important thing is to make generosity part of your budget before other needs determine all spending.

Finally, giving can **start now**. You don't need to wait until you graduate from high school, earn more, or reach every financial goal. Think of how powerfully the boy's lunch was used by Jesus—the "five loaves and two fish" (Jn 6:8-13). No matter what stage of life we are at, no matter how small or large our resources seem, we ask God how he might want to use them for his purposes.

If you are a student, a young adult, or a parent teaching your children, you can begin with a gift appropriate to your means. Small acts practiced faithfully shape the heart.

Deliberate giving is spiritual giving. At times we may be led to give spontaneously. But in the bigger picture, **generosity grows through habit.**

Would you set aside time in the coming weeks to make your giving plan for the year ahead? Bring the numbers and the uncertainties to the Lord. Then take a first step. A regular habit can help generosity become a settled part of following Jesus.

Question 5. How Do We Give?

Regarding giving, Paul instructs the Christians in Corinth, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

From this simple verse, we notice that *how* Christians give involves prayer, freedom, joy and intentional decision-making.

Pray first. To "decide in the heart" involves asking the Lord to show us both where his heart is directed and where money may have a hold on our own heart. Where might money be offering a sense of security and control that belongs to God? Where have we seen his faithful provision before? For some, giving more will mean letting go of a comfort. For others, the faithful step may be to begin giving consistently. Ask him for wisdom in the circumstances of your own household.

Second, **give freely**—free from a begrudging attitude and free from compulsion. To give "reluctantly" is to give with resentment. To give "under compulsion" is to fear man or divine judgment as we give. To give freely is to give because of the Gospel, because of grace. Check your heart for negative attitudes when you give. If you see them, confess them to God, then ask him to remove them.

Third, **give gladly**. Cheerfulness does not mean the amount feels effortless. Sacrificial giving may feel costly; David refused to offer God something that cost him nothing (2 Sam 24:24). Joy grows as we remember who receives our gifts—ultimately the Lord, but also real people—and what he can do with them. Paul says the Corinthian offering "is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God" (2 Cor 9:12).

Finally, **decide**. Paul did not leave the gift to chance. The Corinthians were to consider it in advance and have it ready (2 Cor 9:3). Talk with anyone who shares responsibility for your finances, look at your budget, and determine a commitment you can make with integrity. A **pledge** is one way to put that decision into practice. It also helps our church plan responsibly for ministry in the year ahead. Stewardship Sunday gives us a useful moment to bring that decision before God.

No pledge can earn God's favor. In Christ, we have already received his indescribable gift. As you consider what to give this year, place your possessions alongside the rest of your life on his altar. Trust him, and give toward his purposes with a willing heart.

In Christ,



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