

How do you tend to react when you hear a pastor preaching on money? Too often we hear the words, “stewardship,” or “generosity,” or “giving,” and just tune out the rest of the message. One of the dangers when this happens is we are potentially missing out on a very important spiritual discipline. God does not want us to miss out on all the great gifts He has prepared for us. This means we are called to grow as complete Christians. Not holding back on any spiritual discipline, including generosity.

God makes this promise to us throughout scripture—that He will bless us when we bring our first-fruits to Him; the first portion of all we earn as an offering to Him. It is a promise that He even invites us to test Him on, because He knows how much power money tends to have in our lives; how we tend to turn lots of things over to God before our finances. In Malachi we read God saying, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, ’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”* This is the only place in the Bible where God says, “test me.” I bet there are some people hearing this message today who have experienced the peace and assurance in God’s provision when they turned over their finances to Him.

Our heavenly Father wants what is best for us, His children. We need to make the move from “what God wants from me” to “what God wants for me.”

- From duty to desire.
- From scarcity to generosity.
- From debt to freedom.
- From fear to faith.

In the book of second Corinthians, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth prior to his visit. In the ninth chapter of this book, Paul is teaching the Christians about the grace of giving and encouraging them to complete the collection for poor Christians living in Jerusalem. In verses six to eleven he writes:

What I mean is this: the one who sows a small number of seeds will also reap a small crop, and the one who sows a generous amount of seeds will also reap a generous crop. Everyone should give whatever they have decided in their heart. They shouldn't give with hesitation or because of pressure. God loves a cheerful giver. God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace. That way, you will have everything you need always and in everything to provide more than enough for every kind of good work. As it is written, He scattered everywhere; he gave to the needy; his righteousness remains forever. The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us.

There is a lot of wisdom packed into those few verses! Paul is writing to people in order to teach them that giving is not about the law, but about being cheerful and knowing God will provide. Compared to most of the world, we are all rich. We may not think that way about ourselves, but we are. We have been made rich—so that—we can be generous in every way. God will provide for our needs. Paul says God will “bless us abundantly,” caring for all our needs. Just like the law of sowing and reaping he mentions repeatedly, this is one of Paul’s fundamental teachings of faith. In Philippians 4:19 he writes, “*My God will meet your every need out of his riches in the glory that is found in Christ Jesus.*”

Jesus was a Faith-Raiser, not a Fund-Raiser

You might remember the story told in the book of Mark, in chapter 12 where Jesus is sitting with his disciples across from the temple collection box. Mark tells us that many rich people were throwing in lots of money. By the way, those would have been coins which would make a lot of noise so everyone would hear their offerings. Jesus said nothing. Then a poor widow put in two small copper coins, and Jesus spoke up saying, *“I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than everyone who’s been putting money in the treasury. All of them are giving out of their spare change. But she from her hopeless poverty has given everything she had, even what she needed to live on.”* If Jesus had been a fund-raiser, he would have congratulated the rich people. He was clearly more interested in faith-raising. As we all should be still today. For me, all of Jesus’ messages about money come down to what is recorded in Luke 12, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Think about your answer to the question of where your treasure is as we continue today.

Two Challenges:

- 1) Move from closed to open
- 2) Prayerfully consider taking the next step on your generosity journey



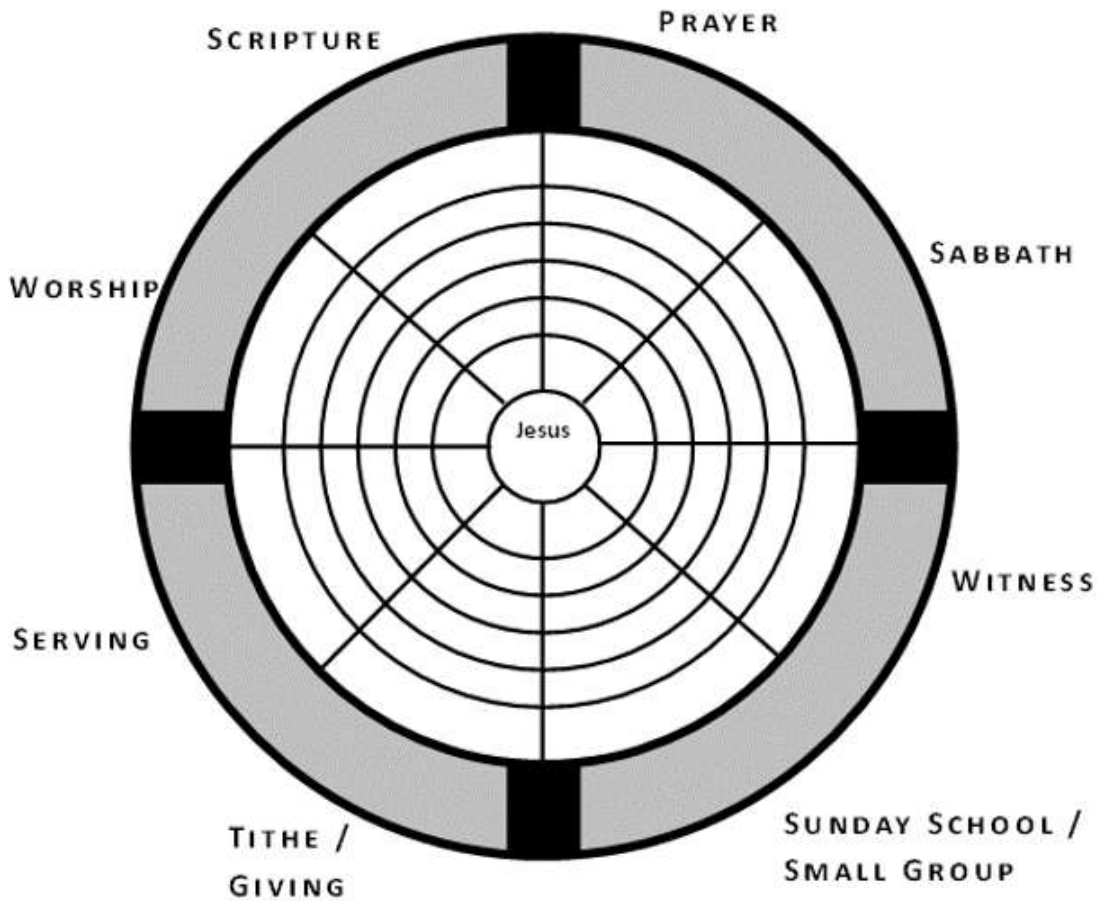
- **Initial** – Someone who has never given any money to a church before. A person at this stage may just place whatever they might have on them in an offering plate or make a \$20 donation online. What a wonderful start to their journey!
- **Consistent** – This is someone who gives to their church regularly, but not based on a percentage of their income. Instead of the giving being spontaneous, a person at this level is being intentional about giving a set dollar amount.
- **Percentage** – Typically this is a person who has prayerfully moved from giving a set dollar amount to seeing how their whole income comes from God and now they want to give a percentage of that back.

- **Priority** – A person, couple, or family who faithfully give ten percent of their income to their church. They are likely giving God what is right, not what is left. They really understand and embrace the “first-fruits” element of giving.
- **Extravagant** – Giving beyond the tithe. The focus has moved from what to give to what to keep. The tithe was never meant to be the ceiling. Throughout scripture the tithe is starting point, not the end goal.

If you have been attending church for a while, you may have heard a pastor or someone say, “it is time to take up our tithes, gifts, and offering,” before they passed around the offering plates. Have you ever given any thoughts to those words? Are they all the same thing? As you begin to pray about how God’s Spirit is guiding you on your journey of generosity, you may want to reflect on what those terms really mean:

- **Tithe** – a tenth of all we have received from God. The first-fruits. Just like a faucet doesn’t produce water, it just delivers it. Our earnings, which may be delivered through many sources, are all produced by God. We give to God first, not what is left over.
- **Gifts** – (alms giving) giving to the poor, humanitarian interests, or benevolent concerns. This has been expanded in today’s church to include giving to a specific ministry or area, above and beyond our giving to the general church fund.
- **Offering** – (freewill offering) originally seen as any amount given in addition to the tithe. Now it is often used to indicate any money given during a worship service. Scripture is clear that it is distinct from our tithe.

Wherever we are on our individual spiritual journeys of giving, God will meet us there and be with us as we take our next steps. Financial giving is often a very personal and private area for many Christians. Hearing a message on stewardship or generosity can make us feel uncomfortable, like when a doctor pokes at our body and causes us to cry out in pain. If you are feeling pain or hearing a voice telling you this message is not for you or that your giving is no one's business, that is not from God. Our heavenly Father only wants the best for us. Which is why He wants us to put our trust in Him and test Him, so that He can open the floodgates of heaven and pour down blessing on us!



Questions for Group Discussions

1. Where have you experienced God's provision in your life? Where have you seen the Fruits of the Spirit in times where you really placed your total trust in God?
2. Who or what has been your main source of influence when it comes to giving at church? What role has the church (pastors or other leaders) played in your perspective of the spiritual discipline of generosity?
3. Over the years, what has been your main obstacle with giving to God through your local church?
4. What was a main take-away for you in this message? Was there anything that was a new learning for you?
5. What do you see as your next step on the giving pathway? What excites you about this next step?
6. How can this group best help you on your journey?