

## Let's Honor The Lord With Our Giving

“Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.  
And whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

2 Corinthians 9:6



# GOD'S PLAN FOR GIVING AND RECEIVING

*For God's Champions of Giving*

### **ABSTRACT**

Nothing impacts the activation and fulfillment of what Jesus is commanding His church to do like the area of giving. Our obedience to God's plan of giving and receiving could very well determine our success in accomplishing the mission He has entrusted us with. How the church handles finances has God's full attention!

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*What Every Disciple Ought to Know!*

**God's Plan for Giving and Receiving**



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*This work is dedicated to the memory of Rev Bob Swanger who graduated to glory in 1995. As my spiritual father and a true apostle to the nations, he wrote a discipleship series under the same title several decades ago. It is my prayer that the present work will meet with the same anointing around the world.*

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible.

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## Introduction

The 21st Century presents us with the greatest opportunities to advance Christianity around the world. The calling and responsibility Jesus has placed upon the church is enormous. Much is riding upon the maturity of every believer. Spiritual leaders agree that we must do a far better job of properly laying the foundation of the Christian faith within believers than was done in the previous century - particularly in the past four decades. This foundation must be laid in an environment of grace, love, and spiritual freedom.

“What Every Disciple Ought to Know” has been developed to help “thoroughly furnish” the next generation of leaders with a resource for making disciples. The units of study that follow are word-centered and will provide the ongoing training necessary for each disciple to mature and move forward in faith and effective participation within the body of Christ. They also comprise a comprehensive teaching strategy that will heighten the unity and spiritual health of the local church.

The modern world has yet to see the true church in operation; full of spiritual life and vibrancy. They have seen the old legalistic righteousness of long-established religious traditions and for the most part, they have rejected it. But it's a new hour for the church. It's time for a new wineskin. Jesus is coming soon! We must make disciples while it is still day. We must teach others all that Jesus has commanded. This is the task of every Ephesians 4 leader around the world. Our prayer is that this resource will cause you to run with the vision to make disciples of all nations.

*Michael D. Gross, General Editor*

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. Matthew 28:19,*

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*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 KJV*

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 KJV*

# Unit 4                      God's Plan for Giving and Receiving

## Chapter 1

### THE ECONOMY OF THE CHURCH

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***And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35b***

#### **The Ten Richest Pastors in the World**

Wealth in and of itself is not evil; it's neutral. The amount of money a person has or has not does not determine his or her relationship with God. Although Jesus said, "***it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven***" (Matt. 19:23), the Word also repeatedly declares that "***God shows no partiality.***" (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; Jam. 3:17; 1Pet. 1:17). James, the brother of the Lord, renders a clear understanding and practical application of God's perspective regarding the rich and poor.

- James 1:9-11 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup> but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.
- James 2:1-9 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality. <sup>2</sup> For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, <sup>3</sup> and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," <sup>4</sup> have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?* <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? <sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? <sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill *the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* you do well; <sup>9</sup> but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

So, why do many leaders and believers have a problem in handling both personal and church finances? The problem with money lies within the heart of man and not God. It's essential to have this spiritual understanding as we approach and assess the economy of the church. And, the extent of the heart problem with man involving money becomes evident when look at the ten richest pastors in the world today.

The ten richest pastors in the world in 2018 according to Forbes provides some interesting insights into the current mindset of some of the most successful ministers and ministries in the world.

1. **BISHOP DAVID OYEDEPO (Net Worth \$150 million)**
2. **BISHOP T.D JAKES (Net Worth \$147 Million)**
3. **PASTOR CHRIS OYAKHILOME (Net Worth \$50 Million)**
4. **PASTOR BENNY HINN (Net Worth \$42 Million)**
5. **PASTOR E.A ADEBOYE (Net Worth \$39 Million)**
6. **PASTOR CREFLO DOLLAR (Net Worth \$27 Million)**
7. **KENNETH COPELAND (Net Worth \$25 Million)**

8. LATE BILLY GRAHAM (Net Worth \$25 Million)

9. T.B JOSHUA (Net Worth \$10 Million)

10. JOSEPH PRINCE (Net Worth \$5 Million)

There are several ways to view the above list, but let's take a brief look at the amount of money involved in these ministries. If you total the amount in dollars, you get \$520 million. On the positive side, this reveals the tremendous giving potential God has placed in the church. Another surprising thing is where these ministries are located: 5 from America with \$266 million; 4 from Nigeria with \$249 million; and 1 from Singapore with \$5 million. I would expect most to come from the most prosperous nation of the world, but instead four of the richest pastors are from Nigeria including the wealthiest pastor in the entire world. If you've ever been to Nigeria, you know how surprising this is given the living conditions of the average Nigerian. But what is most notable about these ministers is what they do with the money. Would you be alarmed to know that every leader in this list apart from the late Billy Graham has been accused of mishandling of finances. For example, one is buying his fifth jet and all but Billy Graham wear designer clothes, have multiple personal cars and mansions for houses. This is in addition to huge ministry complexes attended by thousands of believers. Is this the mark of success in ministry around the world? Is this the ideal or goal for a new generation of leaders? If so, then few can measure up. It's time for the church to wake up to the way leaders handle finances in the church because how you handle finances as a spiritual leader will make you or break you in the ministry.

### **The Rise of Ecclesiastical Crime**

God is desiring to transform the economy of the church. This is an area where many traditional leaders have fallen short of the mark. In fact, the abuse in handling church finances has reached epidemic proportions worldwide. This is documented every year in the Status of Global Christianity Report compiled by the highly respected Gordon-Conwell Center for Global Christianity.<sup>1</sup> This 2018 report shows that ecclesiastical crime from 1970-2000 surpassed the amount generated for global foreign missions by a billion dollars. Yes, one billion dollars! And from 2000-2018 the amount grew to seven billion. This disparity is projected to be ten billion dollars by 2025 and a whopping 70 billion by 2050. The following chart documents the alarming increase of criminal abuse within the church. Keep in mind that these statistics deal only with reported financial crime and not the vast, overall mishandling of finances by church leaders.

<b>Christian Finance</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Mid-2018</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2050</b>
<b>Income of global foreign missions.</b>	\$200 million	\$3 billion	\$18 billion	\$56 billion	\$70 billion	\$180 billion
<b>Ecclesiastical Crime</b>	\$300,000	\$5 million	\$19 billion	\$63 billion	\$80 billion	\$250 billion
<b>Difference</b>	+\$199.7 million	+2.95 billion	-\$1 billion	-\$7 billion	-\$10 billion	-\$70 billion

The above situation is alarming to say the least. Our 5-Fold Global Teams have observed leaders taking up multiple offerings during church services around the world. One of our team members reported on a recent strategic mission observing seven offerings in one worship service. God will not honor this practice because it does not reflect, even remotely, His plan for giving and receiving. We firmly believe and call for

<sup>1</sup> Gordon-Conwell Center for Global Christianity. *Status of Global Christianity, 2018, in the Context of 1900-2050*, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/StatusofGlobalChristianity2018.pdf>

established leaders to stop doing such things that clearly violate God's Word. New generation leaders must restore God's perspective on giving and receiving to the church.

## **The Call for the Mind of Christ in Finances**

Leaders need the mind of Christ in all areas of ministry. This equipping manual is designed to provide apostolic training in finances for a new generation of leaders, so they can disciple others in God's plan for giving and receiving. It's time for apostolic and prophetic engagement in this training. The traditional pastoral model with its religious/Levitical mindset and practices regarding church finances needs to step aside for the new wineskin in the economy of the church. This apostolic training is long overdue, but we can take much encouragement in how Paul concluded his leadership training conference in Miletus.

- **Acts 20:32-35** "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup> "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Notice the mindset of this prominent apostolic leader. He did not **"covet"**. This means he did *"not turn upon a thing."* Multiple offerings in a church service is a sign that a leader or leaders desire things and have turned away toward stuff they feel is necessary for them. Paul, however, had a giving mindset. Although he did receive offerings, he supplemented them with his occupation of tent making to meet his needs. In addition, he helped meet the needs of others who were with him. Why did he work so hard and make such an exhaustive effort? It was to **"support the weak."** In this context, he calls these new generation leaders from Ephesus to always be mindful of what Jesus said, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** After years of labor, I can joyfully report that many 5-Fold Global partners are actively engaged in God's plan for giving and receiving.

## **The Most Important Questions**

What are the most important questions for new generation leaders when it comes to money? Jesus had a strong emphasis on this topic. Money is the second most talked about topic in the Bible. It's only second to the topic of the Messiah, Christ, and Jesus. There are more than 2,300 verses about money, wealth, and possessions in the Bible. In addition, 11 of 39 parables of Jesus are about money. Why did Jesus spend so much time on this topic? The following verse answers this basic question:

- **Matthew 6:19-21** "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It's because money is a heart issue. I cannot emphasize this point enough. But why is it so important to acknowledge this? It's because Jesus knew that the devil would use money to deceive and seduce man to fall in love with it. Remember, Paul warned Timothy and us about this.

- **1 Timothy 6:10** For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

In addition, Paul revealed that in the last days men would be among other things **"lovers of themselves"**

and **“lovers of money.”** (2Tim. 3:1). He said, **“And from such people turn away!”** (2Tim. 3:5). In other words, Paul, is telling us to stay away from those who have such an affection for money because the offspring is not good. New generation leaders fully dedicated to God and what He’s called them to do will keep away from all this. So, the most important question from a biblical point of view is regarding where your heart is on the issue of money. Why is this such an important question? It’s because you cannot serve both money and God.

- **Matthew 6:24 NLT** “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

I like what Pastor Mike Cameneti of Faith Family Church in Canton, Ohio, says about this Scripture. *“You can’t serve God and money, but you can serve God with money.”*<sup>2</sup> This gives rise to another question about how you handle money. Am I handling money the way God wants me to? Am I focusing more on my way and less on God’s way? New generation leaders today must renew their minds with the Word of God on this topic. Although your fathers may have failed you on this, it’s time to remember the Word of the Lord and handle finances His way. I pray this manual will assist you to equip others in God’s plan for giving and receiving.

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor Mike Cameneti, Faith Family Church, *Money Math*. Teaching series, November 4, 2018.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What did Jesus mean when He said it was difficult for a rich man to enter heaven?
2. James declares that God shows no partiality and he uses a practical church situation in the church. What is the situation, and does it happen today? Give examples from your own church experience.
3. Why do you believe so many ministers and churches have problems handling finances?
4. Review the details of the ten richest pastors in the world. What is your view of their wealth and success compared with a biblical and worldly perspective?
5. Do you believe God desires to restore the economy of the church today? Why or Why not?
6. Describe the apostolic training of Paul from Acts 20:32-35. List and define the importance of at least three points that reflect the mindset of Christ on finances.
7. There are more than \_\_\_\_\_ verses in the Bible about money, wealth, and possessions. Why did Jesus talk so much about money?
8. What are the most important questions about money from a Christian perspective?

## CHAPTER 2

# BIBLICAL TRUTHS ABOUT TITHING

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*And he gave him a tithe of all. Genesis 14:20b*

### **Is Tithing Biblical?**

A fresh momentum has come upon the church throughout the world. The Holy Spirit is speaking to churches today. He is giving strategies to impact cities and regions for the glory of Christ. The church of the living God cannot be stopped! She will not be content to just hear what the Spirit is saying, but fully intends to activate what He is speaking to us. Nothing impacts the activation and fulfillment of what Jesus is commanding His church to do like the area of giving. Our obedience to God's plan of giving and receiving could very well determine our success in accomplishing the mission He has entrusted us with.

There is a marked decline in the number of Christian families who tithe or even regularly give toward God's work. This is a big problem for churches! According to the Barna Research Group, only 7% of born-again adults within the United States currently tithe to their local church. In addition, international leaders report that many believers do not tithe because they feel they are in such poverty they simply cannot give. Although there are a number of reasons for this, many remain unconvinced that the practice of tithing is relevant for the church today. Some are beginning to question the Biblical validity of tithing. For this reason, the first truth that must be restored to the church and every Christian is that tithing is Biblical. There are at least 32 specific references to tithing in the Bible; 13 of these occur in the New Testament. The Hebrew word and Greek word for tithe both mean "a tenth". The earliest occurrence of this practice is found in chapter fourteen of Genesis.

- **Genesis 14:18-20** Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

Jacob also was committed to the practice of tithing. He had a dream where he saw God's angels ascending and descending on a stairway reaching to heaven. The Lord spoke to Jacob that night in Bethel. He gave him the covenant promises and said, "**I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.**" (Genesis 28:15b). Jacob's response the next morning again reveals that the practice of tithing is a Biblical practice.

- **Genesis 28:20-22** Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

### **Tithing is a Work of Faith**

One of the fascinating features regarding the practice of tithing is that it is a work of faith rather than a work of the law. Many believers approach tithing in the legalistic sense. It has been said that "*attitudes determine altitude*". If this is the case, then it is little wonder why so many are "*turned off*" by even the slightest mention of the topic of giving a tenth of their finances to the Lord's work. Often tithing is presented through the perspective of religious legalism. Pastors need to stop presenting tithing from the perspective of the Levitical priesthood. This creates a sour attitude in people who genuinely desire to give

to God's work. This condition has infected many within and outside the body of Christ. A legalistic approach to tithing does not reflect Biblical truth. In fact, as evidenced by the Scriptures quoted earlier from Genesis, tithing began long before the law was even given.

The Bible records that Abram was the first to give a tithe. This is significant because Abraham is particularly noted in both the Old and New Testaments for his faith. After he gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. He received the promise of a son coming from his own body and offspring so numerous that they could not be counted. Most of us would be taken back by such a promise, but the Bible records that Abram believed the Lord.

- **Genesis 15:6** And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.
- **Romans 4:13-15** For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

The point is that tithing involves the obedience of faith. Christians tithe because they believe in the Lord. We give tithes for no other reason than this. It is a matter of faith and not of the law. This is why it's critical when teaching on tithing to present the practice as a work of faith and not from the standpoint of the Levitical system. Although we can learn much from the Levitical system and its purpose under God, we must recognize that it was a system and a priesthood that was no longer needed under Christ and the New Covenant. So great care must be exercised here to present the biblical truth that tithing is a faith practice and not a legalistic practice of a system neither they nor we could bear. The Jerusalem Church recognized this and would not put the Levitical system or Mosaic Law on the new Gentile converts.

- **Acts 15:10** "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

Of course the issue they were dealing with was whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved; however, that would have in effect ushered them into the Jewish faith and the Law. It must be noted that the decision not to do this **"seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:"** (Acts 15:28). They were agreeing with the Holy Spirit. Tithing is a burden, a yoke, when understood under the Law, but a joy when understood and practiced as a work of faith in response to the Spirit of Christ. The distinction that we are making here is one between the attitudes toward tithing under the law and those under faith. Tithing is like a temple tax under the law, but a joyful sowing and reaping under faith. It's a critical distinction when considering how many ministers present a legalist view of tithing.

The issue of righteousness also applies to the matter of tithing because some who follow this practice are often tempted to feel that they are somehow more righteous. This attitude again is contrary to God's word. How can there be any joy with such attitudes? Although the Old Testament law required the Levites to collect tithes from the people, the practice clearly remains a work of faith stemming from the time of Abraham. This is the clear message presented in God's word.

## **Is Tithing Included in the New Covenant?**

Arguments have arisen over the validity of tithing under the New Covenant. Some have gone as far to say that the New Testament doesn't even mention the practice. Of course, this is Biblically inaccurate because as was mentioned earlier, there are 13 references to tithing in the New Testament. The most common of these references is when Jesus confronts the Pharisees.

- *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Matthew 23:23*
- *"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Luke 11:42*

The above Scriptures are typically used to confirm tithing in the New Covenant. This usage is justified since Jesus is clearly saying that giving the tithe is something that they should not neglect. The Greek word *aphiemi* is used in both of the above verses for the English word translated *neglect*. It means "to send away, let go, forsake." If Jesus told the Pharisees not to forsake the practice of tithing, then He certainly intended tithing to continue as the basic practice of His giving plan for New Testament believers.

There is even stronger support than the above verses for tithing in the New Testament. It all revolves around one who is called "**Priest of the Most High God.**" He is given the name **Melchizedek**, which literally means "**King of Righteousness.**" His name appears 11 times in the Bible and nine of these are in the New Testament. He is also referred to as "**the King of Salem**", *Salem* being a shortened version of *Jerusalem*. From the Scriptures, we learn the following things about Melchizedek, particularly within chapter seven of Hebrews.

- ❖ Abraham paid him tithes.
- ❖ He blessed Abraham.
- ❖ He is a type of Priest who lives forever.
- ❖ Levi, yet unborn, paid him tithes in the person of Abraham.
- ❖ His priesthood was permanent.
- ❖ His priesthood cannot be interrupted by man.
- ❖ His priesthood is unchangeable because he continues forever.
- ❖ The permanence of His priesthood in Christ implied the end of the Levitical system.
- ❖ Jesus has his attributes as the establisher of the new and better covenant.

Chapter seven of Hebrews confirms that Melchizedek is like the Son of God. He is without question a type of Christ and could be the very appearance of the Messiah. The significance of Melchizedek's mysterious history is known when the New Testament declares at least three times regarding Jesus Christ, "**You are a priest forever, According to the order of Melchizedek.**" (Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:17) For this study, it is interesting to note that *Melchizedek* reveals the greatness of Christ in the context of who is paying and who is receiving tithes. This warrants taking an even closer look at the three main sections of Scripture where this mystery man, named *Melchizedek*, appears.

### **Hebrews 7:1-17 NIV**

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a

tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

#### **Psalm 110:1-7 NIV**

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. He will drink from the brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

#### **Genesis 14:18-20 NIV**

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

The above passages really settle the issue of whether the practice of tithing is to be continued under the New Covenant. God’s word makes a clear distinction between the Old and the New Covenants. These were two different systems. We do see, however, the continuing principle of tithing as demonstrated by Abraham where the greater receives the tithe from the lesser through the principle of faith. The greater is obviously Melchizedek and our Lord Jesus Christ is declared a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The Biblical and logical conclusion is that Jesus Christ, like Melchizedek, receives tithes from His followers under the new and better covenant. The Lord is more than worthy to receive the tithe from His people today.

### **The Tithe is Holy**

There is one more basic Biblical truth regarding tithing that every believer needs to understand. God’s word declares that the tithe is holy. We pay the tithe to the one true and holy God. The Hebrew word

*kodesh* refers to “a sacred place or thing.” Nothing has changed regarding God’s view of the tithe. It still belongs to the Lord and it remains a sacred thing to the Lord.

- **Leviticus 27:30-34** And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD. If a man wants at all to redeem any of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed." These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Christians do not take tithing seriously enough today. Although the above passage appears after the Mosaic Law was given, we need to remember that the New Testament concludes that even Levi collected and paid the tithe through Abraham on the basis of the obedience of faith. Interestingly, those who neglected paying tithes were required to give an additional 20% of the original tithe amount. The Biblical evidence clearly demonstrates that tithing continues to be a basic foundational practice of God's plan of giving and receiving.



## CHAPTER 3

# BIBLICAL TRUTHS ABOUT OFFERINGS

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*"Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, Acts 24:17*

### **Tithes and Offerings are not the same**

The Bible makes a distinction between the tithe and an offering. This is evident in both the Old and New Testaments. We have learned that the tithe involves giving or paying a tenth of everything to the Lord in the obedience of faith. The tithe belongs to God and is holy or set apart unto the Lord. An offering is a gift or present offered as a sacrifice or expression of honor to God. An offering emphasizes the presentation of oneself to the Lord through the gift or gifts being offered. The offering is like a tribute to God. This has led some to conclude that the real substance of Biblical giving begins after the tithe. Although both tithes and offerings are included in God's plan of giving and receiving, different words are used to describe each. The following chart helps us clearly see the distinction between tithes and offerings.

CATEGORY	HEBREW	REFERENCE	GREEK	REFERENCE
Tithes	<i>ma'aser</i>	Malachi 3:8	<i>dekatoos</i>	Matthew 23:23
Offerings	<i>terumah</i>	Malachi 3:8	<i>prosphora</i>	Acts 24:17
Gifts	<i>minchah</i>	2 Chronicles 32:23	<i>doron</i>	Luke 21:1

### **The Perfect Offering**

There are many types of offerings mentioned under the Levitical system. Burnt offerings, peace offerings, heave offerings, wave offerings, meat and drink offerings, just to name a few. All these involved the sacrifice of animals for the atonement of sins in accordance with the Mosaic Law. These offerings will not be discussed in this study because they have been made obsolete by the one perfect offering of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world.

- **Hebrews 10:11-14** And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

This one perfect offering can never be equaled. This is why Jesus is called the Lamb of God. There is unmatched power in His blood. This one perfect love offering is fundamental to our understanding and submission to God's giving plan. Many do not fully comprehend the depth of Christ's love for us. This is another reason why the passion for giving is lacking in many believers today.

- **Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

An offering is something that is voluntarily given up. Jesus Christ is the greatest example of the true nature of an offering. He is described as a fragrant offering and sacrifice. This literally refers to “a pleasant scent or sweet smelling odor of a thing”. It means that God is well pleased with the offering. The heart and manner in which offerings and gifts are presented does matter. For instance, the wise men worshipped and presented their gifts to the Christ-child.

- **Matthew 2:11** And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Two of the key giving words are used in this passage of Scripture. *Prophero* literally means “to carry some burden; to bear towards; to bring or lead to; to present or offer up a thing to someone; to hand it over to them.” *Doron* refers to more than a gift or present. It’s “a gift offered in expression of honor.” Only those offerings that express genuine honor to Jesus Christ bear the good fragrance that please God.

## **Sacrificial Gifts**

The Lord takes special notice of our giving. There are some offerings that can be clearly classified as sacrificial gifts. One of the greatest examples of the giving of sacrificial gifts is found in the Biblical account of the widow’s offering.

- **Luke 21:1-2** And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.

The first thing we see in this account is that Jesus is paying close attention to the giving of God’s people. He’s not just giving a casual glance, but He is evaluating the heart approach in giving. How does God evaluate our giving? For one thing, the quality of a person’s gift is not determined by the amount given, but by the amount of sacrifice involved in the giving. Jesus understood this and passed the lesson on to His disciples.

- **Luke 21:3-4** So He said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.”

It is also important to note that the act of putting the offering into the treasury demonstrates both obedience and also the sacrificial element of giving. The Greek word *ballo* literally means “to throw, cast, let go, to give over to one’s care.” The widow gave her gift without any strings attached. She gave it unto God. She relinquished her ownership and rights over the gift. Once an offering is given, it belongs to God. Too often, Christians attach their own sense of control and ownership over their giving long after they have placed their tithes and offerings into the church’s treasury. Although it’s important to give strategically, the admonition is to “let it go! It’s no longer yours! It is God’s!”

Another example of sacrificial giving is with yet another widow. The widow of Zarephath was in a very desperate situation. Her needs and misery were not ignored by God. Elijah came to this widow requesting some water and a piece of bread in obedience to God’s instructions. Although there is no indication that Elijah had any prior knowledge of the woman’s situation, her reply reveals the dire circumstances of her life.

- **1 Kings 17:12** So she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.”

God’s plan was to send Elijah to strengthen her faith and to give her what was needed at a time when she felt all was lost.

- **1 Kings 17:13-16** And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: "The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth." So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.

The obedience of faith resulted in God's provision in a very difficult situation. God always honors the obedience of faith even when it comes to giving.

## Memorial Offerings

The Bible also reveals offerings that become a memorial before God. One such offering involved the plunder that was taken from battle. It was presented as an offering to the Lord.

- **Numbers 31:52-54** And all the gold of the offering that they offered to the LORD, from the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels. (The men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.) And Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of meeting as a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD.

A memorial offering is one that is so noteworthy that it is written or recorded. The Hebrew word literally means *"a memorable thing, day, or writing."* When was the last time your or your church's giving made it into God's record book? We have the permission of God to mark that day when it happens. In this case, the people voluntarily presented 420 pounds of gold seized in battle. They could have used this to prosper themselves and their families, but instead they offered it up to God. Their decision made this offering noteworthy to God and worthy of remembrance for His people.

Memorial offerings like the ones described above are not limited to the immediate community of faith. Cornelius, a Roman military officer, gave in such a way that his giving got heaven's attention. The Bible describes this soldier as dutiful and respectful of God. He prayed to God and was compassionate to the poor. He gave large amounts of money to help the needy. The beginning of his dialogue with the angel of the Lord during a vision reveals the impact of his giving.

- **Acts 10:3-4** About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

His prayers and his offerings to help the poor ascended to the very presence of God. We would not expect a military officer, someone not yet a New Testament believer, to give in such a way. But he did and what followed was him, his relatives, and his friends coming to Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit. This opened the door for the salvation of the Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

## Freewill Offerings

We have been discussing various classifications of offerings. It is important to note that the Bible does draw distinctions between types of offerings. As we have stated earlier, our study ignores the Levitical system of animal sacrifices because we have the one perfect offering for sin in the blood of Jesus Christ. God's plan of giving and receiving; however, remains His plan now and forever through Melchizedek and Christ. Understanding this helps us appreciate God's plan and to gain a renewed passion and joy in our giving. Such is the case with what the Bible calls **"freewill offerings."** This type of offering literally refers to *"a spontaneous or abundant gift that is freely and voluntarily given."* Like the other offering classifications,

this special offering is distinct from the tithe.

- **Deuteronomy 12:4-7** You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things. "But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.

Often freewill offerings are designated for specific purposes. For instance, Scripture records the impact of such offerings in constructing the Tabernacle.

- **Exodus 36:2-7** Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work. And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do." So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done--indeed too much.

Freewill offerings accumulated in such abundance that Moses had to restrain the people in their giving. It's also impressive to note that these special offerings were brought by the people on a daily basis. Now that's a passion for giving! God's people did not grow weary of giving.

The practice of freewill offerings had a similar impact in the reconstruction of the temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.

- **Ezra 2:68-69** Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.

The above freewill offerings totaled 1,100 pounds (500 kg) of gold and about 3 tons (2.9 metric tons) of silver besides the clothing. Again, the impact staggers our imaginations today. Likewise, the freewill offerings were so abundant and important to the work of the Lord during the revival inspired under Hezekiah's reign that the Bible records someone had to be put in charge of these special offerings.

- **2 Chronicles 31:14** Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the keeper of the East Gate, was over the freewill offerings to God, to distribute the offerings of the LORD and the most holy things.

Is it too much to expect that our passion for giving today match or even exceed this example in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ? The church needs this giving anointing restored now for the work that lies ahead. We must exemplify the heart of David regardless of our circumstances.

- **Psalms 54:6-7** I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O LORD, for it is good. For He has delivered me out of all trouble; And my eye has seen its desire upon my enemies.

### Discussion Questions:

1. True or False: The Bible makes a distinction between tithes and offerings. Is this a new understanding for you?
2. Use the Scriptures from the chart on page 11 to consider the role of tithes, offerings, and gifts. Record your observations here.
3. Why have the editors chosen not to discuss in this manual the various types of offerings mentioned under the Levitical law?
4. "*Our offerings should smell sweet to God.*" Explain the meaning of this statement in the context of this chapter.
5. The q\_\_\_\_\_ of a person's gift is not determined by the a\_\_\_\_\_ given, but by the amount of s\_\_\_\_\_ involved in the giving. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
6. We have examined the Biblical examples of two widows who gave sacrificially in obedience to the Lord. Has the Lord recently challenged you to give sacrificially in obedience to Him? How did you respond? How do you hope to respond to future challenges?
7. In this chapter, we considered the example of Israelite commanders who gave a offering of wealth taken in battle. They could have used this wealth to prosper themselves and their families, but instead they offered it up to God. Can you recall a time when your local church gave a freewill gift

## CHAPTER 4

# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR GIVING

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*The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. Haggai 2:8*

### **Everything We Have Belongs to the Lord**

God's plan of giving and receiving operates in accordance with a number of sound principles and guidelines. In this chapter, we will discuss just a few of the Biblical principles for giving. The first principle that must govern our giving is the clear understanding that all we have belongs to God. There's so much concern in our culture with what is mine and what is yours, what we have and what we don't have, and what we need and what we want, that we easily forget that everything belongs to Him in the first place. The God who carries us on eagles' wings still owns the whole earth.

- **Exodus 19:3-8** And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

God also owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalms 50:10). The earth and all its fullness is His.

- **Psalms 24:1** The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.

Many believers today simply do not operate by this principle. As a result, their passion for giving is almost nonexistent. Their actual giving is what could be called "*spare change*" giving. Understanding that all we have belongs to God should be the launching pad for every giver. Incorrect thinking at this point will lead to misguided giving. We could even find ourselves in a situation clearly described by the prophet Malachi.

- **Malachi 3:8** "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, "In what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings.

Although the above Scripture has been misused by greedy and self-motivated ministers, we must remember that what we possess is not our own but what God has entrusted to us. Yes, we have a God-given responsibility to manage our possessions and steward our giving strategically for the advance of God's kingdom on earth, but all that we have belongs to Him. He expects His people to participate in His giving plan.

### **Giving is an Indicator of what is in Our Hearts**

Our giving is to be loving and spontaneous. It's to flow from hearts that are fully devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's interesting to note that one of the primary ways of telling what is really in a person's heart is in how they relate to and give of their finances and material possessions.

- **Matthew 6:19-24** "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. "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

We must decide in our hearts whether we will serve God or money. The Bible says greed is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5). A Levite from Cyprus accurately demonstrated pure devotion to God when he sold land he owned and placed the money at the feet of the apostles. The apostles called this man Barnabas, which means **“Son of Encouragement.”**

- **Acts 4:34-37** Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

On the other hand, Ananias and Sapphira violated the principle of the heart in their giving. God would have honored their gift even though they had kept a portion for themselves, but they misrepresented their giving and, according to the Scriptures, *“lied to the Holy Spirit.”*

- **Acts 5:3-4** But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

The condition of their hearts in both cases was revealed through their giving. Nothing has changed in this today. The majority of Christians who have, for whatever reasons, cast aside God's plan of giving involving tithes and offerings are on shaky footing. They are characterized as robbing God and lying against the Holy Spirit. Our giving is not to be used for self-justification. The Bible concludes that we honor God when we give with the right heart according to His plan.

## **Giving Operates in the Realm of Faith**

We have already discussed the Biblical truth that tithing is a work of faith. It's very important that this truth also be stated as a primary giving principle because so many believers operate in their giving on the basis of religious legalism. This alone has destroyed within many a healthy incentive to give according to God's plan. There is no life in religious legalism. The Bible declares that we must freely give just like we have received. This freedom encompasses all aspects of giving, including the giving of our ministry to others.

- **Matthew 10:8** Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

The Greek word used as *“give”* in the above Scripture refers to *“a gratuitous or unwarranted gift.”* The spiritual blessings that we have received from the Lord are to be given in ministry to others. Whether we are giving tithes and offerings or spiritual blessings in ministry to others, we give on the basis of faith.

Our giving is not ritualistic or pious acts, but acts of faith in Christ Jesus. This is clearly seen not only in the practice of tithing, but also in the planting of financial seeds into others' lives. Financial seed planting is a great example of operating in the realm of faith, and it directly applies to the giving principle of sowing and reaping that will be discussed later. Local churches also need to be encouraged to tithe and present offerings as an act of faith in Christ Jesus. It sets a good example when a local church sets aside a tenth of its contributions for world missions.

## **God Honors the Sacrificial Gift**

There should be no hesitation on the part of believers to give sacrificially. This is the same spirit in which God gave His only Son to us. Paul pointed this out to the believers at Corinth as he encouraged

them to excel in *“this grace of giving.”*

- **2 Corinthians 8:1-7 NLT** Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup> For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. <sup>4</sup> They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do. <sup>6</sup> So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. <sup>7</sup> Since you excel in so many ways-- in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us-- I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

Many leaders, believers, and churches lack this sacrificial spirit in giving. They are resistant to it and even ignore it in their own giving. Nevertheless, the obedience and sacrifice involved in our giving is far more important than the amount of the gift. The new generation must capture this in order to advance God's agenda in every place.

## **It is More Blessed to Give than to Receive**

Ephesus, a city of 250,000 people, followed Jerusalem and Antioch to become the third major center for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, a major General Council of the entire church was held there in 431 A.D. Paul planted the church there with the help of Aquila and Priscilla and others. We might be inclined to visualize a building and many people meeting together for worship, but this doesn't seem to be the case at Ephesus. The church most likely consisted of a network of house churches throughout the city. It was more like a citywide church.

The church at Ephesus was an active movement that began with twelve disciples who received the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul spent two years preaching and teaching the full counsel of God both publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20). All Jews and Gentiles throughout the province of Asia heard God's word (Acts 19:10). It's interesting to note that Timothy, the apostle John, and Mary the mother of Jesus all ended up in Ephesus. The elders of the church of Ephesus met with Paul at Miletus to receive some final instructions. The last thing he said to these elders before he prayed with them reveals one of the most important giving principles for the church.

- **Acts 20:32-35** "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

To be more blessed means *“to be fortunate and well-off in the greatest degree.”* Remembering the words of the Lord involves rehearsing this principle over and over again. This principle comes from the very lips of Jesus, yet many are ignoring it today. Perhaps it is once again time for a rehearsal in the church. ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive!”***

## **Our Giving Creates a Reciprocal Action**

There's a universal law of reciprocity built into God's plan for giving and receiving. This means there exists an active and mutual exchange in God's plan. This principle can also be referred to as the principle of sowing and reaping.

- **Luke 6:38** Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

- **2 Corinthians 9:6** But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Some have falsely concluded that if they give generously, then they will receive much financial wealth and material possessions. Unfortunately, this errant Americanized “*gospel of prosperity*” has circulated around the world. It has caused many to be motivated in their giving by an expected hundredfold return in finances and material things. Their motive is to give to get money and possessions. If taken to its logical conclusion, this misguided view of giving in order to receive the guaranteed financial overflow would make Paul and the heroes of faith appear as utter failures. The same would be true of those serving faithfully in poor nations today. The truth of the matter is that you never see Paul desiring wealth or seeking to get rich from the work of the Gospel. Although Paul had many opportunities due to his influence to capitalize on the matter of acquiring wealth, he literally became a subordinate for the sake of the gospel. However, some modern ministers, primarily from the developed nations, continue to present themselves as more blessed (of greater faith and knowledge and of higher standing) due to their accumulated wealth and material possessions while serving Christ. They become like celebrities because of the people’s misconception of success and their own desire for wealth and fame. One American leader declared on national television that he was the “*Apostle of Prosperity*.” He said that if you would obey God right now and send him \$100, then God would soon return the blessing of \$1,000 to you. Although this man is no longer in the ministry, this kind of stuff is still being spread around the world. It does not accurately represent the truth regarding God’s principle of reciprocity or sowing and reaping. Instead it ridicules God’s true plan for giving and receiving.

- **Galatians 6:7-10** Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We must give to please the Holy Spirit rather than any desire for wealth. The temptation to love money remains a viable force that must be defeated in all of us. God’s word affirms over and over again that He desires to bless us in our giving. It is His will to reciprocate, to even prosper us through our giving. This is not, however, a license to seek material wealth. Christians often expend the blessings of God upon themselves when the primary purpose of God’s blessings is that we might be a blessing to others (See Genesis 12:2-3). Is there anything wrong with a hundredfold return in spiritual blessings?

## **God Wants Us to Test Him on This**

The biblical principles for giving and receiving discussed in this chapter are nonnegotiable. We don’t choose which ones to observe and which ones to ignore. All are essential to God’s plan for giving and receiving. The words of the prophet Malachi are often used incorrectly to force obedience to tithing upon the people of God. Although many believers continue to violate one or more of these biblical principles, the prophet is truly calling the people to return to the Lord.

- **Malachi 3:6-10** "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, "In what way shall we return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, "In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

There are serious consequences to turning away from the Lord and disobeying His will. This

should be obvious to all of us. What we need to understand is that the appeal to return to the Lord is in the relational sense and not the legalistic sense. Note that the way to return to the Lord is brought to life with the call to stop defrauding God and to restore the practice of giving tithes and offerings. Could it be that the majority of Christians who do not give tithes and offerings today have a relationship problem with the Lord? Why do we submit to God's plan of giving and receiving? Why do we bring tithes and offerings? There's only one legitimate reason why we do this. It's because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We submit because we love Him. We give because we trust Him and His plan. Above all, we give to honor Him.

### Discussion Questions:

1. The first principle that must govern our ideas of giving and receiving is the fact that   e   we have   b   to God.  
Take the time right now to list out some of those “things” that come to mind.
  
2. One of the primary ways of telling what is really in a person’s heart is in how they relate and give of their finances and material possessions. We considered the positive example of Barnabus. Share your own example, from experience or from the Scriptures, of a person whose heart was in the right place before the Lord in regard to his or her giving.
  
3. True or False: Christians should give because a religious code compels them to do so. Explain why you believe this statement to be true or false.
  
4. Local churches need to be encouraged to tithe and present offerings as an   a   of   f   in Christ Jesus. What are some practical examples of how a local church might give in this way?
  
5. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Describe your understanding of this statement.
  
6. “Christians often expend the blessings of God upon themselves when the primary purpose of God’s blessings is that we might be a blessing to others.” Consider the following two questions and record your thoughts here.
  - \*Have you sought God for opportunities where you might be a blessing to others?
  - \*Have you been obedient by faith to give and expend blessings as the Lord would direct you?

7. How might you respond to individuals who believe that God is guaranteed to provide them with a specific financial blessing in return for their financial gift to another person or ministry?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Do you personally tithe and give offerings to God? What are your own heart motivations or reasons why you do or do not bring tithes and offerings?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Do you personally desire to submit to God's plan of giving and receiving? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Record here a prayer to God, asking Him to release you from anything that keeps you from walking in faith according to His plan of giving and receiving.

## CHAPTER 5

### NEW TESTAMENT GUIDELINES FOR GIVING

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*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia*  
2 Corinthians 8:1

#### **The Grace of Giving**

The Early Church was a giving church from the very beginning. One prophetic word, however, resulted in a giving anointing like none other.

- **Acts 11:27-30** And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The offering taken at Antioch was only the beginning. Even newly planted churches gave in response to the prophetic word given through Agabus. The New Testament contains a number of comments and instructions regarding the giving and collecting of this special offering. In fact, most of the New Testament guidelines for giving are gleaned from what God's word says about this particular situation. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know the grace God that had been extended to the churches of Macedonia. What was this grace? It was the grace of giving!

- **2 Corinthians 8:2-7**...that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us--see that you abound in this grace also.

We can practically see in this passage all the Biblical principles for giving in operation. Believers in the 21st century also must view giving as a grace given to us by God. To operate in this grace of giving, we must do exactly what Paul commends the Macedonian churches for doing. They first and foremost gave themselves to the Lord. They began with a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then did they plead (literally beg) Paul and his ministry team to give them the privilege of giving to help the Judean saints. The New Testament guidelines for giving presented in this chapter are very important when placed in the context of Paul's admonition to excel (super abound or overflow in quality and quantity) in the grace of giving as believers in Christ.

#### **Give According to Ability**

What does God expect of us regarding our giving? How much should we give? Should we tithe from the net or gross amount of our income? Of course, tithing refers to a tenth (or 10%) so it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the amount for the tithe. It's Biblical to compute the tithe from the gross amount in order to honor God with the first fruits of everything. Sometimes people respond that they have no money to give. Well, we should recognize that, if you have no income, then 10% of nothing equals nothing. Remember that the tithe is a fixed amount while offerings are variable amounts unless the giver has vowed or pledged a certain amount for the offering. In this case where we have pledged a certain amount, God

expects us to perform our word.

We need to pay very close attention here because God does not expect us to give what we do not have. This rules out “*credit card giving*” that involves indebtedness! The Christians at Antioch who decided to help those living in Judea each did so according to their ability (Acts 11:29). The Macedonian churches gave “***as much as they were able.***” (2 Corinthians 8:3 NIV). Although this passage goes on to say that they gave “***even beyond their ability,***” it is clear that they received extraordinary means from God in the midst of their poverty. The basic New Testament guideline to keep in mind here is that our giving should be in proportion to our income. We give according to our means.

- ***2 Corinthians 8:12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.***

## **Give Generously**

Generosity in giving comes from the Holy Spirit. It is a gift that operates in accordance with the measure of faith given by God.

- ***Romans 12:3-8 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.***

The Greek word *haplotes* used in this passage clearly identifies what it means to “give” from a generous heart. It identifies such giving, as viewed from an objective viewpoint, as being “*liberal or generous in nature.*” This word also refers to one with a singleness or simplicity of heart in giving. This means that they generously gave with no false appearances or self-seeking attitudes. Although the above passage of Scripture is referring to a specific level of anointing that is quite remarkable as a gift, we know that the same quality of giving also applies to the church as a whole (See 2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:11-13). This confirms there’s a giving anointing available for the church today.

## **Give Regularly**

Generally speaking, God’s people today have lost the passion for giving. This passion must be restored to truly honor Christ and fulfill His work in the end times. Although many honor Christ in their giving, many more do not. A large percentage of Christians simply do not give regularly. Paul gave some important instructions to the Galatian churches and then told the church at Corinth to do the same thing.

- ***1 Corinthians 16:1-4 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.***

The Greek words used in the above passage clearly indicate that the context of the “***collections***” is referring to the financial contributions for the poor in Judea. Notice that the above instructions include weekly giving. This also implies that we are to be proactive (prepare beforehand) in our giving. The churches were instructed to be prepared by setting aside their contributions each week. Of course, some give tithes and offerings on a monthly basis while others give weekly, and this is all noteworthy and according to a person’s pay schedule. The guideline here is that our giving is to be regular, proactive, and

in proportion to one's income.

## **Give Willingly and Cheerfully**

The attitude in which we give is much more important than the gift itself. God is more focused on the giver than the gift. Our giving needs to be from the heart.

- **2 Corinthians 9:7** So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

There is the sense that giving is a proof of our love for Christ. This totally refutes the attempts of some to make it a legalistic thing. We are not to give with a reluctant attitude. This means we are not giving out of sorrow or grief or a heaviness of heart. Neither should we give out of some compulsion nor because some necessity has been imposed by circumstances or by the law of duty regarding one's advantage, custom, or argument. No! We give because we love Him who first loved us.

We are so thankful that we choose; we prefer to bring our tithes and offerings to Him according to His plan. This is the cheerful giver that God loves. The Greek word *hilaros* means "to be joyous, prompt and willing to do anything." We are called to honor Jesus with our giving. How prompt and willing are we to do this? If our joy in honoring Him is measured by our giving, then many Christians are failing to show their thankfulness to the Lord.

## **Don't Give for Exhibition**

The Bible portrays our giving as personal to some extent. Jesus says that our giving is to be in secret. This means it is to be hidden, concealed, and private. In addition, our giving is not for public display. We do not give in order to be seen by others.

- **Matthew 6:1-4** "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

*Attention! Caution! Warning!* What do we do when we see these words on a sign? We stop, read, and think before proceeding with what we are about to do. This is exactly what Jesus is telling His followers in the sixth chapter of Matthew. The word *prosecho* used in this passage means "to hold the mind towards", which implies that we pay close attention to and be cautious about how we are doing something. The indication is that we apply ourselves and adhere to Christ's instructions. Notice that giving is the first thing Jesus talks about in the chapter. This is not to say that giving is more important than prayer and fasting; however, the extent to which Jesus deals with our giving does advocate its importance. Remember, it was Cornelius' prayers and giving that got heaven's attention (Acts 10:3).

There is one final point to be made regarding this New Testament guideline for giving. We are not to use our giving for self-justification in any way, shape, or form. There's a drastic difference between the Pharisee approach and the publican.

- **Luke 18:9-14** Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying,

**"God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."**

The Pharisee tried to use his fasting and tithing as a form of justification. Some continue this attitude today by outwardly acting more pious and spiritual in their giving. They boast of their giving to impress others. God, however, is not deceived by such charades. Although our giving is important to God, it does not justify us before Him or others. We must be humble and, to a large degree, private in our giving.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Believers in the 21st century must view giving as a g\_\_\_\_\_ given to us by God. What does this mean to you? How is giving a grace that God provides for your life?
2. We are to give according to our a\_\_\_\_\_. Does this mean that if you are financially struggling that you should consider yourself “excused” from giving your tithes and offerings? Why or why not?
3. Based upon your answer to question 2, consider this sample situation: John is currently unemployed. He has pledged to give a certain amount of money to his local church when he obtains a job. Three months after his pledge, John finds a job. When John received his first pay, he reasons that God knows how much he has suffered and sacrificed for three months. He chooses not to tithe or to fulfill his pledge and uses that money to purchase items for his family. Has John done the honorable thing? Why or why not?
4. Many question how to determine what is a tithe (10%) of their total income. This confusion arises most often in nations or areas where the government takes a share of a worker’s pay in the form of taxes or levies. According to the principles presented in this manual, should you give God 10% of the total you have earned or 10% of the total you receive after any government’s share of taxes are withheld? Do you personally observe this practice? Why or why not?
5. Although all believers can participate in the joy of giving and receiving, there is Biblical evidence that some persons have a supernatural gifting to give “above and beyond.” This gift, like any other from the Holy Spirit, operates in accordance with the f\_\_\_\_\_ that God provides. Do you know of an individual or a local church that operates in the supernatural gifting of giving? How have you seen this gift operate?
6. “A guideline for our giving is that it should be r\_\_\_\_\_, p\_\_\_\_\_, and in p\_\_\_\_\_ to one’s income. Explain this statement in your own words.
7. The **attitude** in which we give is much more important than the gift itself. So, what is really the most important issue that should be addressed if a believer has a “bad attitude” towards giving?

## CHAPTER 6

# SUPPORT FOR ANOINTED MINISTERS & MINISTRY

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*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*  
1 Corinthians 9:14

### **God's Got the Plan**

How are tithes and offerings to be used? This is a fair question. In the following three chapters, we will present what the Bible says about this. God's word does not leave the distribution of the collected tithes and offerings to man's imagination. The Scriptures present His plan and we may be surprised by the clarity of His plan. Basically, God's plan prioritizes three main areas of use for the finances of His church. First and foremost is the support for His anointed ministers and ministries. Second is the ministry to the poor. Third is the care of the local church. These represent God's priorities. How the local church uses the tithes and offerings says a lot in regard to whether their priorities are God's, man's, or a combination of each. God's word makes it very clear that the primary purpose of the tithes is for the livelihood of those He has called to minister for the work they do.

- **Numbers 18:20-21** Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel." Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.

This support plan is not the idea of man. Rather, it represents God's will for the use of our tithes. There's much ignorance and abuse among spiritual leaders and congregations in this area. Some church leaders have attained celebrity status and much wealth in their ministries. They have publicized their status as the example for others to follow. Many have been led astray with such striving for personal gain in ministry. Thousands send only \$10 or more each month, but it is enough to make these mega ministers with their mega kingdoms into multi-millionaires. Sadly, many people today appear driven by a misconception of success.

We must also consider the other side of this story. There are a significant number of local churches and ministries that notoriously fail to give adequate support for their ministers. Most ministers continue to labor faithfully in obscurity. We all need to be reminded that little is much when God is in it. God's word connects God's blessing upon His people to their obedience in bringing the tithes to support the anointed ministers and ministry.

- **Deuteronomy 14:28-29** "At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Jesus also gave instructions regarding the livelihood of those who preach the gospel when He sent forth the twelve and the seventy.

- **Luke 10:3-7** Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. But whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house." And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. (See also Matthew 10:7-10)

Obviously, Jesus believed that God-ordained ministers were to receive financial and material support. It will become more and more evident during our discussion of this specific use of the tithes and offerings that God has designed the plan to provide a living for those He has chosen for fulltime ministry. Both the Old and New Testaments teach this. Those who are called by God and who labor in the ministry should be paid reasonable, fair wages!

## The Nehemiah Perception

There is a particular view among many that ministry is easy and anyone can do it. One editor remembers his grandmother's words when he told her that he was entering the seminary to become a minister. She said, *"Why don't you want to work for a living?"* In another instance, an editor overheard two men talking at the local YMCA. The one was telling the other how easy it was to prepare sermons. He told his friend about a web site with every sermon topic you could imagine. He enthusiastically added that all you have to do is select one, add a few addendums, and you've got a good sermon. Interestingly, neither men were pastors or in the ministry, but both attended a weekly Bible study in a local church.

These perceptions may be more common than we want to accept; however, we can see that there has been a drastic devaluation of the importance of ordained and trained ministers. One of the primary areas we see this devaluation is in the reluctance of congregations to give a fair wage in support of full-time ministers. The next generation of ministers is seemingly being forced into secular employment. Local churches are justifying this as *"tent-making."* In reality, this *"weekend warrior"* mentality has little in common with Paul's circumstances of working with his own hands to help provide his livelihood. Here was a man of God whom the Holy Spirit used to spread the Gospel throughout the world as well as to pen 75% of the New Testament. It's quite doubtful that this man of God made tents on a full-time basis in order to minister on the weekends.

Nehemiah was a leader who faced many challenges in the rebuilding of the Temple and restoration of ministry after the nation of Israel had experienced seventy years of captivity. He was perceptive regarding a condition that could seriously hinder the God-given vision of ministry and rebuilding.

- Nehemiah 13:10-14 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, **"Why is the house of God forsaken?"** And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

Is Nehemiah's perception also accurate today? Are God's chosen and anointed ministers being forced to return to secular employment because of the disobedience of God's people? Believe it or not, the same condition exists all over the world today. Nehemiah would ask us the same question: ***"Why is the house of God forsaken?"*** This was such an important issue to the fulfillment of God's will that Nehemiah contended with those in charge. The Hebrew word *reeb* literally means *"to toss in the sense of to grapple or wrangle with someone."* It means to hold a controversy over the matter. It implies that we defend, complain, debate, rebuke, and plead over an issue that has been neglected because it is important to God. When is the last time we heard someone complain in the local churches about the overall ignorance and neglect in working the plan that the living God has designed for His ministers? This may appear like a strong statement, but it is accurate. Neglect in this one area alone has given opportunity for demonic activity in the church.

## The Laban Spirit

One of the most notable spirits in operation within the context of how local churches handle their responsibility of supporting God-ordained leaders is the Laban spirit. This familiar spirit is so named after Jacob's father-in-law who changed his wages according to his own whims. Of course, God did not bless Laban in this and even rebuked him when he wanted to kill Jacob for leaving without notice.

- **Genesis 31:38-42** These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."

This same spirit has been operating in churches for decades. As an example, consider one church organization which began paying a minister to develop and implement a particular mission. They gave a small income and allowance to the minister. The Lord's hand was upon the minister and the ministry grew rapidly. For whatever reason, the main leaders of the organization instructed the minister to "*put the brakes*" upon any more growth. There was, however, one major difficulty. The Holy Spirit was producing the growth and desired it to continue. The minister's wages and allowances were discussed often with modifications. In the midst of ongoing debate on the validity of restraining growth, the leadership reduced allowances without notification in order to restrict the growth of the ministry. Have you ever heard of anything so bizarre? It's like having people lined up to get into a church and saying to them that they must go home because this is too much growth. In addition to this, the organization increased and decreased wages at will without ever paying the minister what he actually deserved according to God's word. This is the Laban spirit and it's still operating in local churches and ministries today without much restraint. There's good news for ministers who have been victimized by the Laban spirit. God sees your hardship and the work you have done and continue to do for His glory. He will not send you away empty-handed. The church must take authority over the Laban spirit and make things right for the anointing and blessing of God to remain.

## The Hireling Mentality

There is another spirit that hinders local churches in supporting ministers and the ministry. Jesus makes mention of it in His discourse about the Good Shepherd.

- **John 10:11-18** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

Many churches continue to relate to the ministers of the Lord as their "*hired hands*." They view them as mere wage workers, which is the definition of a hireling. This hireling mentality is very dominant in a lot of churches and ministries. Jesus, however, draws a clear distinction between a good shepherd and a hireling.

<b>GOOD SHEPHERD</b>	<b>HIRELING</b>
<b>Owns the sheep</b>	<b>Is not the owner</b>
<b>Knows the sheep</b>	<b>Does not know the sheep</b>
<b>Sheep listen and follow</b>	<b>Sheep scatters when attacked</b>
<b>Brings others in</b>	<b>Doesn't care for the sheep</b>
<b>Lays down his life</b>	<b>Abandons the sheep</b>

The hireling mentality creates its own set of rules and expectations. These are usually based upon the secular work model, which includes standard office hours with, of course, around the clock availability and complete customer satisfaction. However, ministers are called by the Lord and must follow the Good Shepherd. They are shepherds under the Good Shepherd. The Bible makes it clear that those called to the fivefold ministry or governmental ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher are to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). They have a training mandate which requires them to stay continually in prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1-7). These are the minister's primary responsibilities under God. The first apostles knew that they had to stay with God's plan. Although it may appear admirable to see a minister doing menial tasks in the church like setting up tables, it indicates in actuality that time in prayer and the Word may be suffering, which often is the case. It's apparent that there can be quite a difference in how the Lord desires ministers of the gospel to spend their time and in what the local congregation expects. This is a growing controversy for both ministers and the church, but it's a discussion that must take place and is long overdue.

## **Un-muzzling the Ox**

There is a particular admonition that appears three times in the Bible. It first occurs in the Old Testament and then twice in the New.

- **Deuteronomy 25:4 You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.**

The Old Testament occurrence is a very unique context. It's a command referring to animals. Working animals were to be given sufficient food and care to maintain strength and health in order to accomplish the assigned labor. They were to be treated well and even rewarded for their labor. Not to do so would literally stop or at least hinder the work. The New Testament references reveal clearly that this command is to be applied even more so to ministers of the gospel. They deserve fair treatment for their labor.

- **Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 9:7-12**

- **Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." 1 Timothy 5:17-18**

Two very important points should be taken from the above Scriptures. First, there's the God-given authority of ministers to receive financial and material support to provide a livelihood for themselves and to do the ministry. Second, special attention for adequate provision should be given to those who work hard and are skillful in the preaching and teaching of God's word. It's not uncommon to find secretaries paid more in the local church than ordained men and women of God. Of course, local churches are hard pressed to properly fulfill the above instructions if God's people continue to withhold the tithes and offerings. This is why un-muzzling the ox begins with a spiritual transformation of our hearts and a renewing of our minds so that our understanding and obedience is shaped by the Holy Spirit in accordance with God's Word. One small group of believers called on a minister to help begin a new church in a rural area. They agreed to a small salary with the stipulation that when the church grew they would immediately provide a full salary for the minister. The church's budget more than doubled over the next year and the minister approached the chief elder in the church with a request for full salary. The elder replied, *"It's too early for a raise."* This elder was a very good man; however, he had been conditioned by the hiring mentality we discussed earlier. After the congregation received teaching from God's Word on the topic, this elder repented along with all the people. The minister was given the needed salary and God grew the church from 60 to about 200 people before the next storm.

It is sad that many churches view the minister's salary in a worldly way. As a result, the minister becomes like a beggar. There's also the humiliation factor with the kinds of questions directed toward ministers. *"How much do you need? How much does your spouse make? How many dependent children do you have?"* The minister's needs and salary are scrutinized and made public before all. This is something that is not usually practiced in secular employment. The attitude is that we will support God's ministers only at the subsistence level. Even many good churches say they can't pay because *"The budget won't allow it. To adequately support the ministers would be at the expense of current ministry. We will pay our ministers when the growth comes."* Ironically, when local churches hire office staff, they would not even contemplate offending someone by asking them to work fulltime at minimum wage. Yet, if the truth were known, more ministers than we could imagine are borrowing and using credit cards for the necessities of life. In the United States, it is not uncommon for some ministers to opt out of the government social security system just to have enough money each week to put food on the table. All these things muzzle the ox. There will come a day when God will lift His anointing and blessing from churches that continue to operate in this way. God's command stands firm today, ***"Do not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain."***

## **What We Learn From Paul, An Apostle of Christ**

We have learned that support for ministers and ministry is a very important part of God's plan for giving and receiving. This is one of the primary uses for our tithes and offerings. What Paul says about this topic gives us a solid foundation as to how ministers and local churches are to operate in this matter. What do we learn from Paul?

- ❖ He did not seek wealth or personal gain. (1 Corinthians 9:12-19; 2 Corinthians 12:14-15)
- ❖ He understood his authority to receive support. (1 Corinthians 9:1-6)
- ❖ He had an accurate Biblical understanding of his authority to receive support. (1 Corinthians 9:7-12)
- ❖ He allowed the Holy Spirit to direct him in his decision to receive or deny support. (1 Corinthians 9:15-18)
- ❖ Sometimes he worked outside the ministry for his support. (1 Corinthians 9:6; Acts 20:34)
- ❖ He received support from local churches for himself and others with him. (Philippians 4:10-20)

Although Paul lived by the Gospel in accordance with the Scriptures, he never permitted the need for provision to become his vision. He knew how to do ministry whether he had plenty or little.

- **Philippians 4:10-20** But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

In addition, he does not seem to indicate a lack of finances hindered him in ministry. Often ministry today is overshadowed with one appeal after another for provision. This seems justified because fewer and fewer believers are giving tithes and offerings. On the other hand, ministers need to keep their eyes upon the Lord and what He has called them to do. Paul is a great model to imitate. I encourage young leaders today to just do the ministry Jesus has called you to do in the obedience of faith. Do ministry His way and provision will follow from the Lord. The generational pattern of first seeking provision to do ministry needs to be broken in the new generation. The mindset that says, "*I can't do ministry because I have no money,*" is a lie and does not represent the New Testament ministry vision for the harvest! I urge every new generation leader to capture the truth in the early ministry of Peter and John. It involves the healing of one crippled man begging for financial support at the beautiful gate of the Temple.

- **Acts 3:1-10** Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.<sup>2</sup> And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple;<sup>3</sup> who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.<sup>4</sup> And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us."<sup>5</sup> So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.<sup>8</sup> So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them-- walking, leaping, and praising God.<sup>9</sup> And all the people saw him walking and praising God.<sup>10</sup> Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

How many dollars, schillings, naira, rupees, etc. did the ministry cost these servants of God? Without any money, these ministers obediently went to a three o'clock prayer service and were used by God to bring complete healing to one cripple. This one healing led to 5,000 men alone coming to Christ. It also spurred a tremendous giving anointing in the Early Church.

- **Acts 4:4** However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.
- **Acts 4:32-37** Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,<sup>35</sup> and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.<sup>36</sup> And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus,<sup>37</sup> having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

I encourage and exhort new generation leaders to operate in this way. Let nothing hinder you in the ministry. The provision will follow! God will provide! You be faithful in the ministry!

## **Spiritual Authority**

Some have mistaken Paul's decision to present the gospel free of charge as a mandate for all ministry situations. This couldn't be further from the truth. The fact that Paul sometimes did not require support from some churches is so he would not risk hindering the Gospel. The church today is filled with many leaders who abuse their spiritual authority when it comes to finances. This has hindered the Gospel and abused the saints. Leaders should not seek money, but God. They should labor in prayer and the ministry of the Word. The Holy Spirit will deal with the hearts of God's people when they are presented the Word on God's plan for giving and receiving. Appeals are warranted when led by the Spirit but prodding the saints about giving creates a negative mindset in the hearts of believers. Giving is a good thing when done God's way. We learn from Paul that we must exercise discernment in giving and receiving. He had refused help from the church at Corinth, but later asked them to forgive him for this wrong.

- **2 Corinthians 12:13 For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!**

The point is that ministers of the gospel, that is those God has called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11), have been given the right by God to live by the gospel they preach. This involves receiving of the tithes and offerings. This also means that they can choose to give up their rights in any given situation as led by the Holy Spirit. There's both the privilege and the power of choice, but neither is to be abused. The church needs to understand that the spiritual authority given ministers to live by the gospel is totally applicable today. Churches that accept and follow God's plan in supporting anointed ministers and ministry will receive the greater blessing and anointing of God.

### Discussion Questions:

1. "There is much ignorance and abuse among spiritual leaders and congregations regarding God's plan for the use of the tithe." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What experiences have led you to agree or disagree?
2. Nehemiah contended with those in charge of the Temple in regard to the release of sustenance for those ministering in the house of God. Why do you believe that he was so passionate about this principle?
3. What will be the impact if the Laban spirit is allowed to operate in your local church? What can be done to cease the operations of this spirit within a congregation?
4. Contrast the attitudes of a "good shepherd" with those of a "hireling." Consider how these attitudes have impacted the local church.
5. Review I Corinthians 9:7-12 and I Timothy 5:17-18. What two major principles should be gleaned from these Scriptures regarding the provision for anointed ministers and ministry?
6. Although Paul lived by the Gospel in accordance with the Scriptures, he never permitted the need for \_p\_\_\_\_\_ to become his \_v\_\_\_\_\_. How did Paul learn to keep his proper focus in this area?
7. **Consider this sample situation: David, the pastor of a local congregation of believers, has been given the freedom to travel and visit family members in another city.** He has asked Martha, an anointed minister of the Word, to preach for two Sunday services while he is out of town. Martha agrees to fulfill this ministry and offers to do so without any financial payment. Is this an appropriate offer by Martha? Why or why not?

*"From your bounty, O God, you provided for the poor." Psalm 68:10*

#### **God is Concerned for the Poor and the Needy**

Who are the poor? We will define the poor as those people among us who have little or nothing in the way of wealth, goods, or means of subsistence or support. True poverty is when someone is destitute, must beg, or be dependent on others and society for his or her sustenance. They become subject to abuse and oppression because of their destitute state. In the Scriptures, the poor are often identified as the widows, fatherless, aliens, and orphans. Throughout the pages of Scripture we see evidence of God's boundless love and compassion for his people. With amazing signs, wonders, and miracles, He provided for the needs of the poor and the oppressed.

- He raises the poor out of the dust, And lifts the needy out of the ash heap. Psalms 113:7
- Delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him Psalms 35:10b

#### **God is Concerned that His People Help the Poor**

##### ➤ In the Old Testament Law

A serious issue facing all nations is the care and provision for its poor. One view is to let the poor fend for themselves and not become a burden to society. Another view is that governments have a responsibility to provide for all their citizens, especially the poor and deprived. God's view is very clear in the mandate He gives to the Israelites to care for the poor, the widows, and the orphans.

- Deuteronomy 15: 7-8 "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

Long term poverty was not permitted in Israel. The wealthy and financially secure were responsible to help and house the needy and deprived.

- Leviticus 25:35-37 If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit.

##### ➤ In His Unchanging Character

Providing for the poor is not a suggestion; it's a command from the Lord. This may require for many of us a change of heart, mind, and attitude. God truly blesses those who give freely of their possessions, time, talent, and energy. When we give, God grants us unending supply and blesses us with a spirit of joy.

- He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy. Proverbs 14:31
- He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor. Proverbs 22:9

- The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself. Proverbs 11:25
- He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given. Proverbs 19:17

### ➤ In Christ's example

Jesus lived out the perfect response to the poor and needy. Whether he was preaching, teaching, or healing, He ministered to them in love and compassion. His public reading of the Scriptures in the synagogue in Nazareth revealed the depth of His concern for the poor and broken.

- **Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;**

When John the Baptist was in prison, Jesus sent this message back to him:

- **Luke 7:22 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.**

### ➤ In New Testament commands

Christians who have Christ and have faith need to display it to a needy world. To "*not bother*" is a sign of a life not touched by grace. False faith has no desire or need to help the needy. Faith needs to be backed up by works. John challenges the love of God present within us when we neglect the obvious needs of the poor and destitute. James is saying that if the grace of God has penetrated our lives, then we will be changed and we will act with mercy and compassion toward our brothers and sisters in need.

- **By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 1 John 3:16-17**
- **Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27**
- **If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2: 15-17**

When you reflect on ministry to the poor and oppressed, perhaps, you recall a small Catholic nun by the name of Mother Teresa. In 1979, she won the Nobel Peace Prize for work among the poorest of the poor in the world. She was a humble woman who wanted no recognition or acclaim for herself. Yet she was known globally for her compassion and mercy to the poor and ill, orphans and lepers, the destitute and dying. She was indeed a woman who embodied Christ's passionate love and mercy for the poor, the sick and suffering. She sets an example for all of us and quickly dismisses all our trivial excuses for not helping the poor. We say that we're too busy; we don't have time; we can't be bothered; we don't have the skill or finances; it's the responsibility for the government and social organizations; it's not our problem. But Christ is explicit in His commands for us to take personal responsibility for caring for the needy.

- **Matthew 25:31-40 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was**

sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

## **God Is Concerned that the Church Demonstrate His Love for the Poor**

God does not commission the national governments to represent His concern for the poor; He commissions the Church of Jesus Christ. Scripture clearly sets forth the very important obligation for God's people to be vitally involved in the ministry of mercy to the poor in their midst, in their neighborhoods, and in distant places. As we look at history, it is often the local church community that initiates the provision of places of shelter for the poor and the aliens. In Europe, some of the earliest hospitals were established after the Reformation by the Reformed churches. In the United States, the original homeless shelters, early orphanages, and hospitals were all instituted by churches or individual Christians zealous for the work of the Lord. Through their faithful obedience to God's commands, these and other believers have compassionately ministered the love of Jesus to the masses of poor throughout the world, proving themselves to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. If we don't reach out in our giving, we miss the full understanding of God's principles regarding giving and receiving.

1. We miss out on God's deep concern for the poor and needy. It was said of King Josiah:

**Jeremiah 22:16** He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then it was well. Was not this knowing Me?" says the LORD.

2. We miss out on Christ-likeness because Christ is the ultimate giver. Grace is giving, and Jesus was full of grace and truth. Giving was an expression of His nature. We give because He first gave to us.

**2 Corinthians 8:9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

3. We miss out on blessing.

**Acts. 20:35** I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive.

4. We miss out on evangelistic opportunities. So many opportunities come when we reach out to the poor. Jesus said that people would know us by our love one for another. What an example the early church gave us as they willingly sold their assets to give to the needy.

**Galatians 2:10** They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

5. We miss out on a great privilege. During Paul's third missionary journey, he collected money for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. The Macedonian churches were told that they need not contribute because they were so poor themselves. But they pleaded for the privilege.

**2 Corinthians 8: 1-5** Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then

to us by the will of God.

So many churches today have isolated themselves from the very people with whom Jesus spent His whole ministry. The poor will always be with us. Are we going to take seriously the command of Jesus to remember the poor? The world is full of people who are hurting, lonely, defeated, hungry, uneducated, and destitute. If we really are like Jesus, we will seek many opportunities to show mercy to the poor and suffering. Remember, that when a church ministers to the needy, they are actually ministering unto Jesus himself. The church that has neglected the needy has robbed itself of a great blessing of God. Let us pursue the blessing of ministering to the poor.

## **God Attaches His Promises to Our Ministry to the Poor**

There are a number of Biblical promises associated with our ministry to the poor. This is another reason that we should remember the poor. God is faithful to what He has promised when we do His will.

- ❖ We are blessed. Proverbs 22:9
- ❖ We are refreshed. Proverbs 11:25
- ❖ Our light will rise. Isaiah 58:10
- ❖ We will receive deliverance in time of trouble. Psalms 4:1
- ❖ Our reward will be as lending to God. Proverbs 19:17
- ❖ We will have treasure in heaven. Matthew 19:21

We must, however, minister to the poor and hurting out of a pure and genuine heart. It's not enough to just have an intellectual knowledge or spiritual knowledge of the ministry to the poor. As the church, we need to be transformed in our thinking and reacting so that we deal with the poor and the hurting with the compassion, empathy, and love that Jesus has for them. A key indicator of what kind of a disciple of Jesus you are is how you relate to the poor in your own church, community, city, and nation. Pray that we can all be renewed in our personal and corporate commitment to reach out to the poor and hurting people of this world.

Reflect on these words from author Ken Medima and consider if such can be said of your local church:

- If this is not the place where tears are understood, where can I go to cry?*
- If this is not the place where my spirit can take wing, where do I go to fly?*
- If this is not the place where my questions can be asked, where do I go to seek?*
- If this is not the place where my feeling can be heard, where do I go to speak?*
- If this is not the place where I can try and grow and love, where do I go to be just me?*

The Statute of Liberty is a monument which stands in the harbor of New York City. The words engraved upon this symbolic statue have historically beckoned to those from other shores:

*"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, and the tempest-tossed to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden door."*

As followers of Christ around the world, can we speak an invitation of ministry to the poor who are flocking to our doors in every nation and in every city?

- **Matthew 11:28-30** Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

**Discussion Questions:**

1. This chapter has provided a definition for “the poor.” Please restate that definition here.
2. Based on the definition in question 1, list some specific examples of the poor who are in your midst.
3. When was the last time you ministered to the poor and needy out of love for Christ?
4. What excuses have you used, or heard others use, in order to escape ministry to the needy?
5. What is missing from a church that does not reach out to others with benevolent type ministries in serving the poor and unfortunate?
6. What are some ways that your church ministers to the poor and needy?
7. What are some suggestions for your church to improve and grow in this area of giving?

## CHAPTER 8

# THE CARE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

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*Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the LORD's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. Exodus 35:21*

### **God's Priorities, Not Man's**

The Scriptures present God's plan for the use of tithes and offerings. In Chapter 6, we considered how tithes and offerings are to be used for support of His anointed ministers and ministry. The use of tithes and offerings with ministry to the poor was our focus in Chapter 7. We will now address the priority of the care of the local church.

Let's define what we mean by "*care of the local church.*" Here we will consider what priority is given throughout Scripture to the construction and maintenance of physical buildings and resources used for assembling together and for reaching out in ministry. In this area, we must be careful to focus on and consider the principles presented throughout Scripture, not being swayed by traditions of men or religious attitudes. As we explore this topic of care of the local church, we will examine the proper attitudes toward this type of giving as seen in the lives of people throughout the Old and New Testament.

### **God Desires a Willing Heart**

- **Exodus 25:1-2** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering.

In the Old Testament, Moses was given specific instructions from God on how to construct a place where the nation of Israel could assemble to worship. For such a place to be built, God chose to ask the people of Israel to participate in the process. He could have chosen for the people to be uninvolved in the process by just speaking a word and seeing the structure supernaturally appear to His glory. But He didn't choose this method. He instead chose to give His people the opportunity to be involved in assembling a structure according to His directives.

- **Exodus 25:8** And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

The people of Israel responded with overwhelming generosity to the call of God through Moses. The nation was given a specific listing of the items that were needed for the construction and equipping of the Tent of Meeting and they met the need. In fact, the people were so generous to God's work that they actually had to be commanded to restrain their giving!

- **Exodus 36:3-5** And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do."

Stop and consider this passage of Scripture for just a moment. The people were so moved to give to the work of the Lord that there came a point when every need was met. There was more than enough to fulfill

the work which the Lord had commissioned.

- **Exodus 36:6-7** So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done - indeed too much.

God had given the people everything they needed to fulfill His requirements. And, through the process of building this place of meeting, God's glory and provision was revealed to the nation of Israel. This blessing of provision for the house of God continued into the days of King David.

- **1 Chronicles 29:14, 16** But who am I, and who are my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You. O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own.

### **God Desires Leaders to be an Example**

In earlier chapters, we have addressed the reality that some church leaders have used congregations to build status and wealth for personal gain. There are those who have been tempted to follow in this ungodly pattern, but God desires a better way for His leaders and His church. Consider the heart of King David as he praised God concerning gifts of provision for the building of the Temple:

- **1 Chronicles 29:16-17** "O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own. I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things; and now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here to offer willingly to You.

Another Old Testament king who demonstrated great concern for the Temple condition was Hezekiah. It was said of him:

- **2 Chronicles 29:2-3** And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them.
- **2 Chron. 31:20-21** Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.

The Temple that was generously restored in the days of Hezekiah was later burned out and brought to ruin (See 2 Chronicles 36:15-21). Even in the midst of such destruction, God had a plan for provision of restoration and rebuilding. After the nation of Israel had been nearly seventy years in exile and captivity, we see leaders of Israel who responded in obedience to God's directives. With the Temple in need of major repairs, the leaders were responsive to give along with all those who returned to resettle and rebuild the nation.

- **Ezra 2:68-69** Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.
- **Nehemiah 7:70** And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments.

We see here how the people followed the example of their leaders when it came to providing support for the physical repairs of the Temple structure and its furnishings as required for ministry. We see the value of leadership giving generously to the work of the Lord. How important a responsibility the local leaders have to model a Godly example and give with integrity to the work of the local church! Likewise, the congregation has a great opportunity and responsibility to share in the joy of giving with a pure heart to the work of the Lord and support of the ministry of the local church.

### **Seek God's Perspective on Physical Buildings and Resources**

Throughout history, we know that man has seen fit to build a variety of settings for the purpose of Christian ministry and worship. Some are simple and plain; others are ornate and full of earthly wealth. So, what type of facilities and resources should be used by the people of God for the purpose of ministry? Is there a physical structure that is "best" in His eyes? Are there certain goods and resources that are essential to accomplishing the mission of the church? These are challenging questions that should be considered by the Body of Christ in every locale. In fact, the New Testament, while affirming the tithe and offerings, says very little directly in regard to the care of facilities. Greater emphasis is placed upon the care of the people who are the church rather than the place in which they hold their gatherings.

- **Acts 7:48-50 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?"**
- **1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

It is important to keep an eternal perspective in place as we discuss the use of buildings and facilities for the ministry of the local church. We know that not every local congregation meets in the same type of physical structure. Some meet in homes; some rent space in public halls or school buildings; still others own acres of land with multiple buildings and meeting spaces. When trying to determine what facility is most appropriate in each local setting, perhaps our primary question should be: **How does the development and care of this meeting place and its resources help to serve the purposes of God in our city, our nation, and our world?** As we seek the face of God for revelation and direction, we keep our focus on serving the needs of one another.

- **Philippians 2:1-4 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.**

Let us search our hearts: For what reasons do we seek to build and maintain local church resources for ministry? Do we seek personal comfort? Do we pursue a happy place to sit around and feast with other believers while isolating ourselves from a spiritually hungry world? Do we open our doors to the hurting, the broken, and the bound? May we seek the heart of God and the counsel of the Holy Spirit so that the local church facilities and resources we have are used for His purposes and not for our own.

## **God Will Bless Good Stewards of the House**

We are called to be good stewards, those who are faithful to be entrusted with the resources of the Father. Although some may initially be attracted to your local church because of how your buildings and grounds look, they should ultimately know who Christ is through the lifestyles of the people who serve within that local church facility. When the Body of Christ keeps true to God's pattern for a lifestyle of giving and receiving, He gets all the glory in the process!

- **Hebrews 3:1:6 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.**

As believers, we (not physical buildings) are the spiritual house of God with Christ as our Head. As people within the local church, we need to be united in the belief that the buildings and resources we are blessed with have one ultimate purpose: to be used for God's glory. We need to be prepared to live out this belief in practical terms. Consider right now: **Are the people in your local church being good stewards of the buildings and/or resources entrusted to their corporate care? Whether a multimillion dollar facility or a humble village hut, do you value what God has entrusted to your local body?** When Christ returns, will He find us faithful to His purpose, having used what He has given for His glory? Let us thank God for the privilege He has given us to participate in His process, to know Him in a lifestyle of giving and receiving. We need to be faithful stewards in administering His tithes and offerings for anointed ministers and ministry, for the poor and needy, and for the local church facilities/ministry resources.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Take time right now to read Exodus 36:1-7. Reflect and record your thoughts regarding this question: Why were the people of Israel so moved to give to the work of the Lord that every need of the Tent of Meeting was met?
  
2. We have discussed the importance of local leaders who model integrity and generosity in their giving to the work of the Lord. What effect does this type of model have upon the local congregation?
  
3. The congregation has a great o\_\_\_\_\_ and r\_\_\_\_\_ to share in the joy of giving with a pure heart to the work of the Lord and to the ministry of the local church. Do you think that all believers would agree with this statement? What reasons might someone give for disagreeing with this statement?
  
4. Do you believe that your local church facility and/or resources are being used to bring glory to God? If so, in what ways is this being accomplished?
  
5. Consider this challenging situation: In his local church, Mark recently preached a sermon regarding care of the local church. A church member approached Mark after service with the following statement: *"I don't see why I should give tithes and offerings to fund a building and facilities. Aren't people more important? I don't tithe to the church; I give my time and money to individuals as I see a need."* How might Mark best respond to this church member?

## CHAPTER 9

# GOD'S RECIPROCITY

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*If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. John 14:14*

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

1 John 5:14

### **What is Reciprocity?**

From God's perspective, giving is not a "one-way street." A lifestyle of giving and receiving involves reciprocity. We can define reciprocity as "*a mutual exchange; something done mutually or in return.*" It can be demonstrated through a relationship between people involving the exchange of goods, services, favors, or obligations. When it comes to giving and receiving, we must consider the reciprocity of God.

As we examine God's Word on reciprocity in giving and receiving, it is of the utmost importance that we consider the Scriptures as a whole. We should contrast and compare Scripture passages, bringing together the total picture of what is being said, rather than extracting Scriptures from their contextual understanding or trying to link together unrelated Scriptures to prove a point. Our God is a God of blessing and abundance, but He also remains sovereign. He is not a puppet on a string from which we can demand a response to any of our requests. It's sad to say that much of what we call "*faith and prosperity*" in the Western Church today does not work in other nations and is also doctrinally unsound. So, as we consider this mutual exchange between us and God in the area of giving and receiving, we will lay a foundation based upon three important points:

1. **God desires to bless and prosper His people.**
2. **The element of receiving is built into His giving plan.**
3. **Our response in giving requires a focus on Him, not a focus on what earthly gain we would like to receive.**

### **God is a God of Blessing**

Let's consider both Old and New Testament truths which confirm God's desire to bless and prosper those who are faithful to His Word. One only has to take a quick look at the Old Testament to understand that God wants to bless His people. As we examine such examples as Noah with his ark, Abraham and Sarah as "establishers" of many nations, Moses as a deliverer, and Esther as a rescuer of her people, one common quality stands out as bringing God's blessing; that quality is obedience. God wants to bless us, but He also is looking for obedience in our attitudes, words, and deeds. God always honors and rewards obedience to His will. When the Apostle Paul talked about being conformed to His image (Romans 8:29), He was talking about being more like Jesus, obedient to Him in all His ways. We see that principle enlarged in Deuteronomy 28:

- Deuteronomy 28:1-10 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. "Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways."The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.

We can conclude from this passage and others like it that our God is a God of Blessing. He promises blessing to the faithful and obedient.

- ❖ God promised blessing to those who would obediently serve Him.
  - Psalms 144:15b Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!
- ❖ He promises blessing on nations which follow His ways.
  - Psalms 33:12a Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
- ❖ Those who are faithful, He will honor with blessings.
  - Proverbs 28:20 A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.
- ❖ He blesses an obedient heart that gives.
  - Malachi 3:10-11 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 you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty.

Within the New Testament, we do well to consider the heart of Paul. The level of giving which he viewed as needful in his own life was seen as a small thing in light of the blessings of knowing Christ.

- Philippians 3:7-14 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus was very clear in His mandate to the disciples. They were also to give of the spiritual blessings entrusted to them. Paul affirms this message of Christ to the leaders of the church in Ephesus.

- Acts 20:35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Giving from every facet of our lives in response to His love for us will in turn release the Father to

abundantly bless and reveal more of Himself to us.

- **Matthew 10:8** Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.
- **Luke 6:38** Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."
- **Luke 11:9-10** "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

## **Defining Prosperity**

When watching Christian television, many of us can admit to moments when we become extremely irritated, if not angered, by some who seem to convey that we can “*buy God’s blessings.*” While we fully believe in the ministry of divine healing and God’s desire to abundantly bless us, we also know that God is a sovereign God. When preachers “*work the crowd*”, and string together Scriptures or misinterpret their meaning, this is truly a sad thing. We must recognize this truth: if we ask for anything, God may not see fit to answer as we expect. Above all, His sovereign will and timing must be sought and respected as we bring our requests before Him.

One Scripture that merits attention in this discussion is in Chapter Two of the Third letter of John.

- **3 John 1:2** Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

This verse is often quoted as a guarantee that God wants you to financially prosper and, if you don’t, something is wrong with your faith. The Greek word, *euodoo*, is used twice in the passage and literally means to help on the road, to succeed in reaching and only figuratively refers to success in business affairs. In addition, John’s words to his beloved Gaius are incorporated in a simple greeting that one might write to a friend that he wished blessing for. He could have said, “*Have a good day, have a great day, or God bless you...*” It was simply a form of greeting, not a guarantee of financial blessing. Neither the context nor the original text suggests that John wished above all things for Gaius to become financially rich. John’s prayer was that Gaius would be as prosperous in all areas of life as he had been in his spiritual life. The word “**prosper**” carries images of a successful journey. In fact, the same Greek word is used by Paul when he prayed for “a **prosperous** journey” to Rome (see Romans 1:10). Did Paul mean that he wanted to make a lot of money on his way to Rome? Of course not! Though God desires to bless and prosper us, it’s misguided foolishness to use financial prosperity as a universal litmus test for faith. To do so would cause us to falsely conclude that men of God like Paul had little or no faith. Of course, this is ridiculous! To prosper means to have success in what we do. Therefore, biblical prosperity must not be viewed as exclusively pertaining to financial prosperity or material wealth.

- **Psalm 1:3** He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

## Dealing with the Prosperity Doctrine and the Hundredfold Blessing

To understand where some have strayed from sound doctrine, there is a current teaching that needs to be examined. This teaching is the declaration of *“the hundredfold prosperity blessing.”* Paul deals with this error and others like it.

- **2 Timothy 4:3-4** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

One good way to test any new doctrine or teaching is to consider what kind of fruit it would bring to your Christian life. Ask yourself this: Does it tickle my ears or does it challenge my heart with burning love for Jesus and His purpose in the earth? There’s a real “ear tickler” that has become popular in recent years which we will refer to as *“The American Prosperity Doctrine.”* Although this *“abundant life”* teaching varies slightly from place to place, here is a summary of its content: God is a giver! He loves us and wants us to experience the abundant life. (Here proponents of the doctrine will reference John 10:10.) Material prosperity glorifies Him and shows His blessing to our lives, whereas poverty is a curse. He desires *“above all things that you may prosper.”* (Here the misused and misapplied reference in 3 John 2, as discussed earlier) We’re *“King’s Kids”*, so if we’re not prospering financially, then Satan is robbing us of our inheritance in Christ. The secret to prosperity is this: *“Give and it shall be given unto you...”* (Referencing to Luke 6:38). If you give your finances to the Lord, He promises you a hundredfold return in this life (pulling out the content of Mark 10:30). Invest in God, and be prosperous for His Glory!

The above argument (on prosperity) sounds Scriptural enough, but if taken out of context from the rest of the New Testament teaching on money and possessions, it could lead someone to believe that Christianity is the biggest *“get-rich-quick”* scheme on the market. But nothing could be further from the truth! Paul warned us of teachers who would *“think that godliness is a means to financial gain”* and exhorted us to stay away from them. (1 Timothy 6:5).

Prosperity teachers are quick to point out the **“hundredfold return”** of Mark 10:30 as a means to get material gain. Let’s consider the context of Mark 10 for a moment.

- **Mark 10:29-31** So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife] or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

When considered within the context of Mark 10, we see that this promise was given right after Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell everything that he had and give to the poor to have treasure in heaven. This promise was also given as an encouragement to those who had literally already left houses, brothers, sisters, wives, and lands. It was not intended for those who wanted to use God’s promises for personal gain. He did not mean that we would literally get a hundred farms or houses in return for giving one up. He meant that He would amply supply all our needs on earth and would repay us richly in the world to come with eternal life. Many teachers use this Scripture in Mark 10:30 as a blanket promise that anything we give

to the Lord (especially money) will be multiplied a hundred times and given back to us (especially if we give it to them!). But Jesus was speaking about leaving things and relatives, not giving money.

### **Developing an Abundant Life**

What should be our attitude towards money? When we give our life to Jesus at conversion, we are called to give Him lordship over our life and our possessions.

- **Luke 14:33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.**

Because it all belongs to Him, we are stewards, not owners, over what we have. God does desire to give us abundant life, but what is the proper definition of this abundant life? It couldn't be wrapped up in material prosperity, for Jesus Himself said :

- **Luke 12:15b ...for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."**

The Gospel of John tells us that in Him was life and this life is the light of men (John 1:4). Since life is in the Lord Himself, abundant life is a fruitful, personal relationship with Jesus— an abundance of Him!

Scripturally, money and possessions in themselves are neither good nor evil, but they can be used either way. We should note, however, that Jesus warned how hard it would be for those who had riches to enter the kingdom of God

- **Mark 10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"**

In 1 Timothy 6:3-10, Paul exhorts us to guard our hearts and to be careful to avoid false doctrines which promote godliness as a means to financial gain. We are to evaluate all doctrines in light of the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus.

- **1 Timothy 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.**

In other words, if our desire is focused on financial wealth, we may willfully wander into the path of temptations which could destroy us. Although it's true that a man can be covetous in his heart even if he doesn't have two coins to rub together, the Bible warns us repeatedly that money lavished on ourselves has a dangerous way of hardening us to spiritual things.

- **. Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**

### **Giving and Receiving by God's Design**

The real issue we're dealing with here is not whether or not we can prove or disprove the modern day American Prosperity Doctrine in light of the Scriptures. **The real issue is "Where's your heart?"** Even if you could find enough "*proof texts*" to justify your affluence, why would you want to if your treasure is in heaven?

- **Matthew 6:19-20 "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.**

We can allow ourselves to be so spoiled, loading ourselves up with luxuries that aren't really needs. Then we give God what is left over (10 percent if He's lucky) to continue the work so dear to His heart. Some Christians act like they deserve a medal of honor just because they "tithe" of their income! Can you imagine how the Lord must feel? He gives us everything, and we give Him back a small portion of what He's given us, expecting a "hundredfold return"! To suggest that God is some investment banker in the sky or a Santa Claus that is bound to give us high interest rates on the money we give to His work is simply unwise!

Can you imagine being the Creator of the Universe and Giver of Life itself and having your children give to your work for the primary purpose of getting a "return" on what they give? Is that a child's love for his father? NO! It's pure selfishness and manipulation of God cloaked in Christian terms! God is concerned more with inward motives than outward actions when it comes to giving and receiving. Yes, God does want us to contribute generously to His purpose of reaching a lost world, but He wants us to do it with the right motives and from a pure heart. We should not give in order to "get", but with a cheerful heart to please God with our giving. It is truly more blessed to give than to receive. The blessing is in the act of giving itself, not what we can get out of it. Look at Jesus; He's our ultimate example. By giving His life on the cross for a rebellious, sinful world, He has given millions of men, women, and children the opportunity to receive eternal fellowship with the Father.

### **Let Us Examine Our Hearts**

If God's heart is broken over the rebellion in the world, how much more is He broken over the selfishness of His church and those who use His principles for selfish gain? We must examine the attitudes of our hearts and the actions of our giving to see if we really love the Lord. Need is all around us. Is it right for us to live in affluence and "claim prosperity" while millions perish without Christ and others die of starvation? Obviously not! There are many practical ways for you to live more simply in order that others may simply live. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to show you as you seek Him. The Bible provides the best conclusion for our discussion on God's plan of giving and receiving.

***Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5-6 NIV***

**Discussion Questions:**

1. "God is a God of reciprocity". In your own words, describe what this statement means to you in the context of giving and receiving.
2. In practical terms, what does "Godly prosperity" look like to you? If someone is prospering in God, what fruit would be evident in his or her life?
3. How would you respond to the following statement: "I believe that the hundredfold return applies primarily to financial giving and receiving?" Do you agree or disagree? Why?
4. Consider this sample situation: Your friend Martha invites you to a seminar entitled "Finding the Abundant Life in God that You Deserve." What questions might you ask of Martha regarding the content of this particular seminar?
5. You have now completed our study of God's plan for giving and receiving. Reflect on this: What are the most important lessons you have learned through this study? How will you apply these lessons to your life?

## Appendix 1

### Principles of Grace Giving

We learn that prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:27) and one of them named Agabus showed by the Spirit that a famine was coming upon Judea (11:28). The disciples decided to send relief, each according to his ability (11:29). Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were commissioned to take this gift to the elders. Chapters 8 and 9 of II Corinthians deal with the further collection of voluntary offerings for Judea. These two chapters present a clear model for all Christian giving.

- 8:1-4                    *Principle #1* - Outward circumstances and difficulties should not inhibit generosity in giving.
- › The Macedonian churches were not giving out of their abundance; they gave out of their poverty.
  - › They gave not because they had to give, but because they wanted to give.
  - › Their giving far exceeded their financial ability.
  - › They viewed this special offering as a privilege; not as an obligation.
  - › Giving is viewed as a Christian “grace.”
  - › Joy and generosity are twins; they accompany one another.
- 8:5                      *Principle #2* – All financial giving should be preceded with Self-giving
- › They first gave themselves to the Lord.
- 8:6-7                    *Principle #3* – Believers should seek to excel in the grace of Giving.
- 8:6, 10-11; 9:5      *Principle #4* – Worthy stewardship goals should be brought To completion
- › Finish what you begin.
  - › In spiritual things, there is value in completing what you start.
- 8:8-9,24              *Principle #5* – Generous giving gives evidence of the sincerity of one's love.
- › One's motivation for giving should always be love for the Lord and the saints.
- 8:8-9                    *Principle #6* – There is a connecting link between the grace of God and the grace of giving.
- › The grace of God becomes the supreme motivation factor in true Christian stewardship.
  - › Our giving should be rooted in His giving.

- 8:12 *Principle #7* – A willingness to give is more important than the amount given.
- 8:13-15 *Principle #8* – In the economy of God, the sufficiency of some ministers to the deficiency of others.
- 8:16-21 *Principle #9* – The expenditure of God's money should be done judiciously.
- › To honor the Lord
  - › To do vital ministry
  - › To avoid any type of criticism
- 9:1-2 *Principle #10* – Generous, spiritual giving will have a positive influence on the giving of others.
- 9:5-7 *Principle #11* – The attitude in which a gift is given is of utmost importance to God; give cheerfully and willingly; not grudgingly.
- 9:8-11 *Principle #12* – Generosity moves the heart of God to provide more seed and meet all needs.
- › All grace
  - › Always
  - › All sufficiency
  - › All things
- 9:11-14 *Principle #13* – Generosity will result in praise and Thanksgiving to God
- 9:15 *Principle #14* – Generous giving is the natural response to God's indescribable gift.

Taken from a chart by Jim Peacock MA (Hons), Diploma of Teaching.