

A man had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. Visitors were discouraged because he was not to get excited. While in the hospital a rich uncle died and left him a million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. They decided to ask his pastor if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The pastor went and gradually led up to a question. The pastor asked the patient what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, “I think I would give it all to the church.” A few minutes later the pastor wound up in the bed beside him.

Today we begin a three sermon series on giving. We are looking at what God says about giving because it is an important subject, not for the church budget, but for the soul of every person who follows Jesus and worships him. The Bible has a lot to say about money. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke 1 of every 6 verses deals with money. Of the 29 parables Christ told, 16 deal with a person and their possessions. In Paul’s 2nd letter to the Corinthians we learn that...

1. Giving is rooted in God’s love (vs. 6-7) – It says in verse 7 that people should give, not because they *have* to but because they *want* to, because God loves a cheerful giver. Again, the purpose of giving is to remind us of God’s love. We give to God out of the abundance God has given to us. Giving is a recognition of God’s faithfulness, a celebration of his provision for us. Our giving is rooted in the fact that all we have has been given to us from God. Our giving therefore is an expression of our thanks and is part of our worship.

You can give without loving, but you can’t love without giving. What we do for the Lord flows out of our love for him. It is an extension of our worship.

What I think turns people off about giving is the idea that tithing is a command, something we have to do. Again, God asks us to do this not only out of duty but out of love. In the Old testament, there were not only tithes but there were offerings. Offerings were things that people gave freely—beyond the tithe just to show their love for God. In the New Testament we also see offerings. That is why we talk about both tithes and offerings in the worship service. A tithe is just the beginning.

The word “offer” is the essence of worship. We offer our lives to God. There is no other area of life where this is as concrete as it is in the area of giving. It’s where the rubber meets the road. Rick Warren says that “Without even knowing you, if you were to show me your [bank statement] and you were to show me your [calendar], I could tell you right now what you love, because the way you spend your time and the way you spend your money shows what you love the most.” Our Scripture for today, 2 Corinthians 9, also says...

2. Giving supplies God’s blessings (vs. 8-11) – Verse 10 reads, “*Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed.*” The Greek word for “supplies” can be more literally translated with an adverb added: “lavishly supplies, or richly supplies.” The Bible makes clear that when we give, we receive back from the Lord. “*Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God*” writes the Apostle Paul. Let’s all of us understand that our giving leads to blessings. Luke 6:38 says, “*Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*”

Studies have shown that most church goers in North America give about 1.5 to 2.5 percent of their income to the church. This means that a lot of people are missing out on God's blessings when it comes to their finances. A successful businessman was once asked how he could give so much to the Lord's work and still be so wealthy. He replied, "Oh, as I shovel it out, He shovels it in, and the Lord has a bigger shovel."

Not long ago the magazine *Christianity Today* had an article about a movement called the 90 day challenge that is happening in North America. Different churches have asked people to sign up with a commitment to give 10 percent of their income (a tithe) or more, and if "God doesn't hold true to his promises of blessings" after three months, they can request their money back, no questions asked. It's the church's version of "satisfaction guaranteed." They do this based on the Bible's teaching on giving.

One church that participated was *NewSpring Church* in Anderson South Carolina. Their pastor preached a message saying "God literally says, 'Try me out, see if I'm God'" More than 7000 participants took the challenge and less than 20 asked for their money back – that is about a quarter of 1%. This is *supplication* in action. People ask God to "supply" their needs and God comes through. Hundreds of other churches in North America have also given this challenge and have found about the same result, less than 1% of people ask for their money back. The only question I'm asking you today is this: Do you believe in *supplication*, that God supplies that which we need? I believe it.

3. Giving results in God's kingdom advancing (vs. 12-15) – The Apostle says, "*This service that you perform...is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*" When God supplies us, we in turn supply "*the needs of the God's people...overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*" In a real sense giving is sharing the good news—it gives evidence of our faith and it results in God's kingdom moving forward.

We have talked about why we give and the fruit of giving, but I want to say a few practical words about HOW to give. One of the challenges that many churches are having these days is creating an opportunity to give. Many worthy charities and non-profits solicit our contributions with large marketing campaigns. Ken Mawr has no marketing department. One of the tried and true ways to give is to participate in the offering during the service. When the offering plate is passed you can put your money (either cash or a check) into an envelope. Make sure to write down your name or your envelope number so the church can issue you a record of your giving at the end of the year. If you itemize deductions you may get money back...so you can give even more!

Another way to give is through electronic transfer from your bank account or by credit card. A growing number of people in our church are taking advantage of this option. You can go to our church website and click on the "Give Now" button. Then you will be directed to a secure page at the Mission Exchange site of the Presbyterian Foundation for a one time gift, or you can set up regular contributions to the church. That is some of the "how to" of giving.

Tony Campolo, who I first met when I was a freshman in college, tells of being invited to speak at a women's meeting. There were 300 women there. Before he spoke, the president of the organization read a letter from a missionary. It was a very moving letter. In the letter the missionary expressed a need for \$2,000 to take care of an emergency that had cropped up. So the president of the organization said, "We

need to pray that God will provide the resources to meet the needs of this missionary. Brother Campolo will you please pray for us?" Tony Campolo, who can be very blunt said, "No." Startled, she said, "I beg your pardon." He said, "No, I won't pray for that." He said, "I believe that God has already provided the resources and that all we need to do is give. Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to step up to this table and give every bit of cash I have in my pocket. And if all of you will do the same thing, I think God has already provided the resources."

The president of the organization chuckled a little bit and said, "Well, I guess we get the point. He is trying to teach us that we all need to give sacrificially." He said, "No, that is not what I am trying to teach you. I'm trying to teach you that God has already provided for this missionary. All we need to do is give it. I'm going to put down all of my money I have with me right here." Campolo said, "I only had \$15 in my pocket so I wasn't too worried about that." So he put down his \$15 and then looked at the president of the organization. Reluctantly, she opened her purse and took out all of her money, which was about \$40, and put it on the table. One by one the rest of the ladies filed by and put their money on the table, too. When the money was counted they had collected much more than the \$2,000 needed."

Campolo said, "Now, here's the lesson. God always *supplies* our needs, and he has *supplied* for this missionary, too. The only problem is we were going to keep it for ourselves. Let's pray now and give thanks to God for his provision."

Dear friends: God provides. God supplies. God is good. Believe it. Amen.