

HONORING GOD WITH YOUR RESOURCES

SESSION EIGHT

SERVE: Investing your time, talent and financial resources to serve others and build up the body of Christ.

During my sophomore year in college, I burst an eardrum in a nasty spill while water skiing. Over the course of the next few days my ear became infected. I was referred to a specialist at a nearby hospital. I was assured that he was one of the best in the country. What they didn't tell me was that he spoke very little English. In fact, the only thing I clearly understood was, "This is going to hurt." For what seemed like an eternity, he made good on his promise. He went to work inside my ear and it turned out to be the most excruciating forty-five minutes of my life. I survived the pain and lived to tell the story, but it is an experience I definitely do not want to repeat.

Many people experience similar anguish when it comes to the topic of money. We are never quite sure what to expect, but we are pretty sure it's going to hurt. While many of us would prefer not to talk about money, the Bible talks about money and material possessions more than any other topic. That fact alone means that it is important to God and deserves our attention.

It is precisely because money is so personal that it has everything to do with our relationship with Christ. Knowing Christ not only changes our heart and character, it changes our attitude toward material possessions. Everything we have is a gift from God. God blesses us with wealth and possessions for our enjoyment, but he also blesses us so that we can be a blessing. Our personal resources are one of the tools God has placed in our hand to enable us to be meaningfully involved in fulfilling His purposes in the church and the world.

Our God is a generous God and the more we know him, the more we will become a generous people.

GIVING: AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

The Old Testament is best known for its specific standard of giving—the tithe. However the Old Testament is concerned with far more than the amount we give. As you read through the following passages, write down the insights you gain into the biblical perspective on giving.

PASSAGE

OBSERVATIONS

Leviticus 27:30, 32 "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. ³²The entire tithe of the herd and flock — every tenth animal that

passes under the shepherd's rod — will be holy to the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. ...²³so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

Deuteronomy 16:17 Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

1 Chronicles 16:28-29 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength, ²⁹ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Proverbs 3:9-10 Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Malachi 3:8,10 "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings... ¹⁰ 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.



SUMMARY: The people of Israel were instructed to contribute an annual tithe for the upkeep of the temple and those who labored in it, a third year tithe to further support the priesthood and care for the poor, and freewill offerings, usually dedicated to either the upkeep of the temple or care for the poor.

GIVING: A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

While in many cases the Old Testament is about specific standards, the New Testament focuses on the attitude of the heart. As you look at the following verses write down what you discover about the proper attitude in giving?

PASSAGE	OBSERVATIONS
<p>Matthew 6:3-4 <i>But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.</i></p>	
<p>Luke 16:10-13 <i>"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."</i></p>	
<p>Luke 6:38 <i>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."</i></p>	
<p>1 Corinthians 16:2 <i>On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.</i></p>	
<p>2 Corinthians 8:1-5 <i>And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of</i></p>	

sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

2 Corinthians 8:7 *But just as you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

2 Corinthians 8:12 *For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.*

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

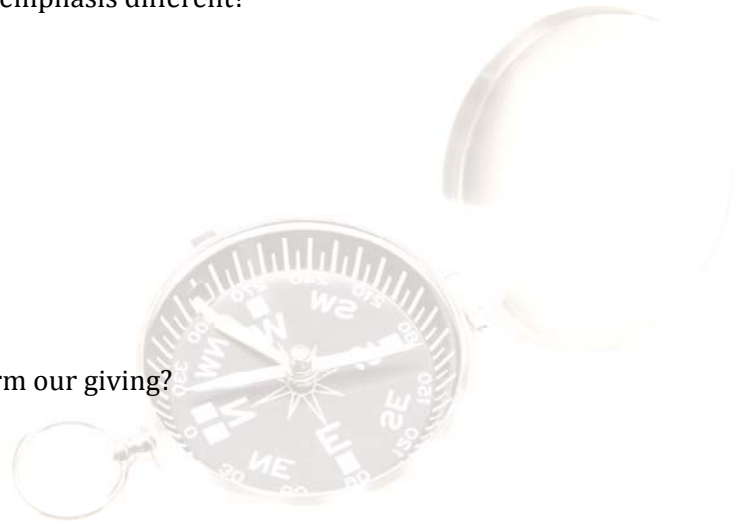


SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why do you think the topic of money is such a sensitive issue for so many people?

2. How would you summarize the Old Testament teaching on giving?

3. In what ways is the New Testament emphasis different?



4. How should the Old Testament inform our giving?

5. How should the New Testament inform our giving?

6. How would you describe the connection between your giving and your overall relationship with Christ?

WHAT SHOULD WE GIVE TOWARD

The following passages give us some hints as to the different causes we should support in our giving. As you read the passages, take note of the causes/needs we are to give toward.

PASSAGE	OBSERVATIONS
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Numbers 18:21 *"I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting.*

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 *At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, ²⁹so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 *If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ⁸Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.*

Haggai 1:4-9 *"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while [my] house remains a ruin?" ⁵Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." ⁷This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. ⁹"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin,*



while each of you is busy with his own house.

Romans 15:26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

Galatians 6:6 Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

3 John 1:5-8 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶ They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

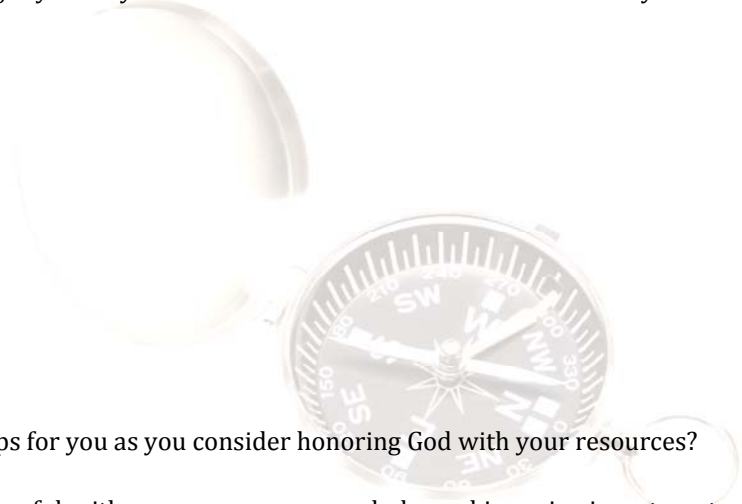


BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR GIVING

We've summarized the biblical attitude and approach to giving in the statements below. Prayerfully consider each one, and then place a check mark beside the ones that are most often neglected in your own approach to giving. Choose one or two of these to concentrate on as you rethink what it means for you to honor God with your resources.

- Worshipfully:** Giving out of deep reverence and an abiding respect for who God is and all that He has done for us (Deuteronomy 14:22, 23; 2 Chronicles 16:28-29; Proverbs 3:9, 10)
- Generously:** Reflecting the generous nature of the God we serve in our response to the needs around us. (Proverbs 3:9, 10, 2 Corinthians 8:12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8).
- Proportionally:** Giving according to our means as God has prospered us (Deuteronomy 1:17; 14:22, Proverbs 3:9,10; 1Corinthians 16:2).
- Faithfully:** Giving to God in a systematic way as income becomes available rather than giving out of surplus or what is left over (Proverbs 3:9, 10; 1Corinthians 16:2) .
- Locally:** Recognizing the local church as the primary vehicle for accomplishing God's purposes --supporting the ministries in which we are involved and from which we derive benefit (1 Corinthians 9:13,14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17,18).
- Globally:** Giving beyond the local church, as we are able, in order to participate in the cause of Christ world wide (3 John 1:5-8).
- Cheerfully:** Giving as a joyful act of worship knowing my attitude in giving is just as important as my gift (2 Corinthians 8:12; 2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Sacrificially:** Making adjustments in my life style in order to more actively support the cause of Christ through my giving (2 Corinthians 8:3).
- Anonymously:** Not drawing attention to ourselves or expecting any personal recognition as a result of our giving (Matthew 6:3-4)
- Expectantly:** Knowing that God will use our gifts to accomplish his purposes and that he will bless us both spiritually and financially as a result of our giving (Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:8) .

3. Are there any long term life-style changes you may need to consider in order to invest more of your resources in God's work?



4. What do you think are the best next steps for you as you consider honoring God with your resources?

- I need to be more careful and prayerful with my resources as a whole, making wise investments, spending more cautiously and saving for the future.
- I need to make some significant life style adjustments so that I can be more involved in giving.
- I need to be more involved in supporting the staff and ministries and upkeep of my home church.
- I need to expand my giving beyond the local church in order to be more personally involved in supporting the cause of Christ world wide and meeting the needs of the poor.
- I need to be more methodical and consistent in my giving.
- God has blessed me so significantly in the past few years that I need to be far more generous in my giving.
- While I do give consistently and proportionally, I need to recover a sense of worship and expectancy in my giving.
- Other:

5. Take the time to think through and write out your personal giving strategy. In the coming months I want to grow in my giving by...



ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT TIME

1. So far in our study we've challenged you to:

- **WORSHIP:** Love God with all your heart and honor Him in all you do.
- **GROW:** Cultivate your relationship with Christ through meaningful time in the word and prayer.
- **CONNECT:** Cultivate meaningful relationships with other believers for mutual encouragement and accountability.
- **SERVE:** Cultivate a servant's heart at home, on the job and in the church.
- To take an honest look at how you spend your time and to pursue those things that matter most.

Continue to work on each of these and incorporate them into your life. Don't get frustrated. These are all lifetime projects.

2. During the course of the week take the time to evaluate your personal giving. Make any necessary adjustments in order to better honor God with your wealth.
3. Work through the study "Living the Message" and come prepared to share your observations and insights.