

# The Practice of Giving

Live with Jesus in Community

“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.” Luke 6:38

“To be clear, we want something for our people (more faith, joy, and freedom, and purpose) rather than something from our people (more money). We want our people to grow into joyfully generous disciples of Jesus, who wisely manage their time, talent, and treasure for the greatest Kingdom impact.” – “A Theology of Kingdom Generosity” by Greenwood Community Church

## INTRODUCTION

Before the world we know existed, Jesus lived in abounding joy with his Father and the Holy Spirit. He possessed the riches of heaven—limitless and glorious. Pain, sorrow, sickness, and death could not touch him. Perfect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness enfolded him perpetually.

He left all that behind to enclose himself in Mary’s womb. Seeing us in our poverty, misery, and helplessness, his love moved him to give up *everything* to save us, including his life. Paul reminds his church of this astonishing truth: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich,” 2 Corinthians 8:9.

And the Father also gives—radically, astonishingly. Every good thing we enjoy flows from his heart to our lives: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights,” (James 1:17). On top of it all, he gives us his Son, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” (John 3:16), and with him, he will spare nothing and give us a home in his beautiful kingdom: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:32.

As children rescued by the profound generosity of God, he calls us to be generous givers as well. No other lifestyle would make the least sense. The Kingdom of Heaven is ours (Luke 12:32), and our Father has promised to care for our every need (Matthew 6:31-33).

Giving is also good for us. It saves us from the love of money and from a false sense of security (1 Tim 6:10, Luke 12:20, and Matthew 6:19-20). Along these lines, Jesus warns us, ““Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,” (Luke 12:15).

Jesus also warns that money allures us, like a false God, and threatens to master us: “No one can serve two masters . . . you cannot serve both God and money,” Matthew 6:24.

To follow the way of Jesus, then, we must practice sacrificial and joyful giving. We recognize that all we have is a gift from God and belongs to him. We are stewards of what he has entrusted to us, so we give toward the purposes of his beautiful kingdom.

This begins with our local congregation. Throughout the history of the church Christians have given tithes and offerings as a regular rhythm of responding to the gospel during community worship. Today we can give online, but the practice remains the same.

Then, beyond our church, our giving extends to those in need near and far.

### THE PRACTICE

Consider how you may grow in the practice of generous giving in the following ways:

- Priority Giving

Consider how you can make giving to see God's beautiful kingdom grow the first priority of your monthly budget—giving to your home church first and then ministries or needs around you—before you pay your bills, save, or spend in other ways.

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

- Percentage Giving

Decide on the percentage of your income you will give regardless of your emotions or circumstances. Work your way up until you are giving at least ten percent of your income to God's kingdom purposes.

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income,” 1 Corinthians 16:2.

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In tithes and offerings,” Malachi 3:7-8.

- Progressive Giving

Consider how to increase your giving over time—for example, working up to giving at least ten percent of your income. When you have reached this benchmark, prayerfully consider how you might increase that percentage.

- Prompted Giving

Be sensitive to the Lord's promptings to give on special occasions. Perhaps set aside a portion of your money for such situations. He may prompt you to be generous with other resources as well—your home, your car, your time, or even your airmiles.

“But if anyone has the world’s good and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” 1 John 3:17.

“Give to the one who asks, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you,” Matthew 5:42.

### INTERESTING QUOTES:

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably given too little away. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small,” C.S. Lewis.

“Stewardship is to live as a steward of God’s resources in all areas of my life; to live out of the awareness that nothing I have is my own,” Adele Calhoun.

“God intends for the body of Christ to battle “affluenza” (the sickness of affluence) and reach the world with his loving care. He does this through people who steward his wealth by sharing their resources and gifts. Stewards distinguish between building their own kingdom and building the kingdom of God,” Adele Calhoun.

“You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead,” Randy Alcorn.

“God has given us two hands—one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing. If we fail to fulfill this divine duty and privilege, we have missed the meaning of Christianity,” Billy Graham.

### HELPFUL SCRIPTURES:

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35

“Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” Luke 21:1-4

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

“Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth...But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Matthew 9:19-20

“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.” Luke 6:38

“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.” Ecclesiastes 5:10

“No one can serve two masters, for 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.” Matthew 6:24

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” 1 Timothy 6:17-18

“True godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.” 1 Timothy 6:6-10

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Luke 12:15

### SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. How were you taught to think about giving and generosity while you were growing up? How does this affect your giving habits today?
2. What makes you feel cheerful about giving? (“God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7)
3. What is difficult for you about giving? Please read the following scriptures as a group and consider these questions.

Jesus says we can fall into two errors:

- We can think this life is all there is and hoard our wealth out of greed (See Matthew 6:19-24—Jesus’ teaching on treasure, and Luke 12:13-21—The Parable of the Rich Fool)
  - We can be afraid that if we give generously, we won’t have enough for ourselves (see Matthew 6:25-33—Jesus’ teaching about anxiety).
4. Talk about your willingness to prayerfully examine your giving habits—priority, percentage, progressive, and prompted. How may your small group pray for you?

After you try this practice:

1. What changes, if any, in your giving have you felt prompted to make?
2. How do you feel about this?
3. Where did you meet resistance in this practice?
4. Where did you find life?
5. How may your small group pray for you about your growth in giving?