

LESSON 5

GIVING TO GOD

*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.”*

Malachi 3:10

Malachi 3:10 is a beautiful promise made to the Israelites. It demonstrates how God will bless us when we follow his commandments. Do we live our lives like we believe His promises? Don't we sometimes make excuses—justifications—for why we don't give more to the Lord? Many of us are convicted of our sin in this respect. We say we love God, and we say he is number one in our lives. Are we demonstrating that love when we withhold our sacrificial offerings?

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so
deceive yourselves, do what it says.
Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a
man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself,
goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom,
and continues to do this—not forgetting what he has heard,
but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

James 1:22-25

Satan tempts us in whatever way he can with worldly pleasures—lust, adultery, drugs and alcohol, gambling, etc. We may feel a world apart from that kind of lifestyle, but Satan is still alive and well in the church. In fact, he's having a party right now. If he can get us to give over our total allegiance from the one true and living God to a lukewarm, watered-down, going-through-the-motions spiritual life, then he has won the battle.

And just how does he do that? By putting into our minds justifications and excuses for not obeying God. What Satan wants is a lukewarm Christian, and that is precisely what Jesus will not have:

*I know your deeds,
that you are neither cold nor hot.
I wish you were either one or the other!
So, because you are lukewarm,
neither hot nor cold,
I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

Revelations 3:15-16

When we see the beauties of God before us, declare our love for our Maker, believe His Word, and serve a risen Savior, shouldn't we want to give back to a loving God of the bounty he has given us? To have the right attitude about giving, we must have the right attitude about our possessions:

GOD OWNS IT ALL!

Until we understand and accept this principle, the words "It's more blessed to give than to receive" will be meaningless. They will be just empty words. With our limited faith, we fail to see that God will not only return our gifts but will bless us with even more.

G. R. Holton tells the story about his early life as a gospel preacher. He and his wife Sharlene were living on "next to nothing," a preacher's salary. The day came when they didn't have enough money to buy groceries and still give the \$8 weekly contribution they had purposed. After discussing the problem and then praying about it, G. R. and Sharlene gave their contribution anyway and trusted God for the food to feed their family of four. Before their stomachs could get empty, G. R. received a twenty-dollar bill from a brother who said he just felt that they could use the money.

*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

Byron and Janet Brown, members of my congregation in Valdosta, Georgia, previously attended a church in Gainesville, Florida. One Sunday a special contribution was collected for the building program, and they decided to give \$25. Money was very tight for the Browns. Byron was in graduate school, and Janet was expecting their first baby. She had just given notice at her job and had no plans to return to work after the baby's birth.

When they returned to church on Sunday evening after giving the \$25 that morning, it was announced that more money was needed in order to make the down payment at the bank on Monday. With the contribution plate being passed and no time for discussion, Byron wrote another check for \$25. Janet described a feeling of panic. The first check was a real sacrifice, but they just couldn't afford any more!

Arriving at work on Monday morning, Janet was called into the boss's office and told that she was receiving a raise because she was such a good worker. Janet exclaimed, "But I've already given you a notice—I'm leaving in one month!" Her boss was firm. She would receive a raise anyway. Janet returned to her desk and quickly calculated her after-tax raise—approximately thirty dollars.

*And 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.
As it is written:
"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever."
Now he who supplies seed to the sower
and bread for food
will also supply and increase your store of seed
and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.
You will be made rich in every way
so that you can be generous on every occasion,
and through us your generosity will result
in thanksgiving to God.*

2 Corinthians 9:8-11

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:35

*And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

Hebrews 13:16

When the church is full of Christians who possess a burning zeal to see the Gospel preached in every corner of the world, there will be no need for pledge cards or fundraising campaigns. The storehouse will be filled. There won't be any excuses or justifications. I know them quite well because I've practiced them myself.

EXCUSE #1 I'M A NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN

There is no command in the New Testament for tithing 10 percent. Are we making this statement because we want to give more than a tithe, or are we using it as an excuse to give less than a tithe? The New Covenant simply says, "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 9:7**)

There were actually *three tithes* under the Mosaic law. Their tithing was much greater than what we think of as 10 percent. In addition, there were freewill offerings and sacrifices above and beyond their three tithes.

1. The *general tithe*, a tenth (**Leviticus 27:30**)
2. The *festival tithe* associated with the sacred meal (**Deuteronomy 14:22-23**)
3. The *poor tithe* given every third year to the poor (**Deuteronomy 14:28-29**)

There is precedent for tithing even before the Law of Moses commanded it. Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek.

*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.
Genesis 14:18-20*

Jacob dedicated to God a tenth of his gain.

*And this stone that I have set up as a pillar
will be God's house, and of all that you give me
I will give you a tenth.
Genesis 28:22*

We who are within the New Covenant have been so richly blessed. We should not view tithing as an upper limit to reach but as a place to begin.

EXCUSE #2 I'LL GIVE MORE WHEN I HAVE MORE

This excuse doesn't work. It hurts more to give on a \$100,000 income than it does on a \$10,000 income. If we don't learn to give when we have a little, then we won't have the desire to give when we have a lot.

*As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich
putting their gifts into the temple treasury.
He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.
"I tell you the truth," he said,
"this poor widow has put in more than all the others.
All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth;
but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

Luke 21:1-4

The next time we are tempted to say that we will give more when we have more, plan a vacation to a Third World country like India and interview some of the 10,000 people who sleep on the streets of Calcutta every night. No matter what our circumstances, virtually all of us have prospered beyond the wildest dreams of our neighbors in the rest of the world.

EXCUSE #3 I'M DOING MY PART

On what basis do we decide we are doing our part? If we have decided our giving is pleasing to the Lord by comparing our giving to others' contributions, this attitude is wrong. We are to give as we have prospered; if we are well off, our giving should reflect it. We need to avoid judging the giving of others and be careful our giving is done in secret.

*Two men went up to the temple to pray,
one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself:
"God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers,
evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."
But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even
look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said,
"God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man,
rather than the other, went home justified before God.
For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Luke 18:10-14

*But when you give to the needy,
do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father,
who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Matthew 6:3-4

EXCUSE #4 I CAN'T GIVE BECAUSE MY HUSBAND IS NOT A CHRISTIAN

A Christian woman married to a nonbeliever cannot help it if her husband refuses to give of their means to the church. However, if she has income from her job or a household allowance which she distributes for varying expenses, she should be able to give a portion of that income. If a Christian woman finds herself in a situation where her husband refuses to allow her to give anything at all, God will help her find a way to be obedient to this command.

*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands
so that, if any of them do not believe the word,
they may be won over without words
by the behavior of their wives,
when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*

I Peter 3:1-2

We should also remember that we are to give much more than just our money. God wants so much more! Our material gifts are not the most important gifts.

*Woe to you, teachers of the law
and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin.
But you have neglected the more important
matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.
You should have practiced the latter
without neglecting the former.*

Matthew 23:23

*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds,
and to be generous and willing to share.
In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves
as a firm foundation for the coming age,
so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

I Timothy 6:18-19

EXCUSE #5 I'D GIVE MORE IF THE CHURCH WOULD USE THE MONEY WISELY

God commands us to give on the first day of the week. Nowhere are we told to distribute the money as we see fit or to oversee its distribution.

*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 Corinthians 16:2

We are probably unaware of all the benevolent work that takes place through the use of our contributions. Those who receive help may not want it advertised. There will be many other opportunities to help others in addition to the contribution we make to our local congregation.

*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse,
that there may be food in my house.*

Malachi 3:10a

Sometimes members of the church feel that those who deliver the word should have a lower standard of living than the rest of us, but the Bible says that this kind of attitude is wrong.

*For it is written in the Law of Moses:
“Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.”*

I Corinthians 9:9

EXCUSE #6 I SHOULD ONLY HAVE TO CONTRIBUTE FROM MY NET INCOME

Gross versus net income as a determining factor in the amount we give is a question frequently asked. Why do we ask that question? Probably because we consider our net pay our take-home pay. When we list our salary on a job application, do we list the net pay? No, because we understand that our net pay is a reflection of our gross pay less the bills we owe—taxes and insurance.

If we use this as a line of reasoning in determining our gifts to God, then why limit it with just taxes? Why not subtract other expenses, too, and give a portion of the remainder? Old Testament believers gave from the best of their crops, not the leftovers! We should

recognize and be grateful that our government, the United States government, gives us something that almost no other government of the world does: a tax break for charitable contributions.

During the time of Christ, the Jews asked Jesus his opinion about paying taxes to Caesar. They were understandably concerned about the taxes collected in Judea because they were very heavy and because the taxes went into the imperial treasury.

*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's,
and to God what is God's.*

Matthew 22:21

EXCUSE #7 I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO BE COMFORTABLE

This excuse worked well when I wanted a new house. In 1975 I lived in a three-bedroom brick house in a middle class neighborhood. Corner lot. Fenced in back yard. Nice neighbors. We had an infant son, lived just a mile or two from the church, and were conveniently close to a shopping area.

But our house only had one bathroom. I didn't have a "real" den, just a bedroom converted into a den. And we didn't have central air conditioning, just what I called a "window shaker" that made too much noise. Besides, I wanted more bedrooms for the next child (which was never born!).

We had a little money put aside, the car was paid for, and we were making it all right on our current income. Inflation was raging at the time, so we could get a great price for our house. Of course, the seller of our new house could get a great price for his house too!

The new house we wanted to buy would double our payments, and we would have to spend more for gas because the only way we could get the size house we wanted was to move further out. After working on the figures, I knew it would be a terribly tight squeeze of our resources.

I finally found a way. By reducing our church contribution, we could buy the house and still have enough to meet our other obligations. It wasn't hard to justify. After all, we had worked hard, and we deserved to be comfortable.

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me."
'But,' you ask, 'How do we rob you?'
"In tithes and offerings."*

Malachi 3:8

Excuse #7 was the biggest financial mistake my family ever made. You see, we never made God a part of the decision to buy that new house. We enjoyed living there but suffered financially because of it for 21 years.

The first four years were the time spent living in it. Those were years that we spent worrying about meeting our obligations. Then we made the move to Valdosta, Georgia, and were unable to sell the house. For the next 17 years we rented our former home to a series of tenants who abused and misused our house, refused to pay rent, and even stole \$5,000 from a family member. I could write a whole book about the experience.

The time we lived there were happy times for us, but I was always anxious about the bills because we barely had enough to make ends meet. I still remember the day the car exploded. I was at a Texaco station getting gas. Just as I was about to switch off the ignition, I heard a sound that made me think back to the time the counselors at 4-H camp warned us to dig fall-out shelters and wait out the coming of the atom bomb. I was so sure that a car could not have created that much noise that I switched the ignition back on. And it happened again.

The bill to replace the engine and the radiator came to \$1,000. That was \$1,000 more than we had. I suggested that we trade the car in on a new one. My husband replied, "And just what do you think they'll give us for a car with no engine?" For someone who had to get a bank loan for \$1,000 to repair a car, I don't know how I thought I could make a car payment every month.

The only time in our forty plus years of marriage we have suffered financially was the time we decreased our contribution! I wish I had thought this excuse through to its logical conclusion. I wonder what my father-in-law would have considered about my line of reasoning. He worked from sun up until sun down to raise five children on the wages of a sharecropper, and he never seemed to think he had any "rights."

In 1997 I made a trip alone to visit my sister in San Juan Capistrano, California. One day we decided to take a short outing to Tijuana, Mexico. Jan warned me before we left what to expect. At the border, poor Mexicans line the street begging for money from American tourists. Jan was a single mother raising a 12-year-old daughter, who believed that allowing her daughter to see poverty first hand would be a positive experience for her.

I took rolls of quarters with me in anticipation of seeing the children begging. A few quarters wouldn't do much for the poor of Mexico, but it made me feel better. We passed through the border crossing and began making our way down a sidewalk built against a concrete wall. There before me lay Mexican women reclining on the concrete walk. One woman was sitting under an expressway overpass so far from the others that a person would have to walk a distance to reach her. Most of them didn't really look at the Americans; they just held out their hands and hollered a few words in broken English.

Then my eye caught the sight of a ragged Mexican woman who looked too old to have children. She was shabbily dressed and sat hunched over on the sidewalk with a filthy, tattered blanket by her side. On the blanket, right on top of the concrete, lay a baby no more than a few months old. Perhaps this was

her grandchild, or maybe she was using the child as leverage to get more money. As I approached her, I noticed that she was much quieter than the others. And then our eyes locked. There in her eyes I saw the pleading look of a woman who truly had needs that were not being met.

Upon leaving Tijuana, I saw Mexican women running in a panic down this same sidewalk. Behind them were the Mexican police. “Are they pickpockets?” I asked my sister. “No,” she said, “the Mexican police are very strict about beggars. They don’t want them here because Americans don’t like it.” I guess the sight of poverty makes us feel too uncomfortable.

I will never forget that Mexican woman’s eyes. They are a reminder to me of the bounty I enjoy as a citizen of the United States. We live in a country where it is a necessity for our babies to have nurseries complete with disposable diapers, motorized mobiles floating over their cribs, and alarms to make certain they continue to breathe. We are like the Israelites wandering around in the wilderness, murmuring and complaining, unable to see neither the miracle of the manna nor the Promised Land just over the horizon.

Not only do we have a responsibility to give to the treasury of the church, we must meet our obligations to help the poor, support widows and orphans, and take the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the whole world.

*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need
but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?
Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue
but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we
belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.*

I John 3:17-19

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:
to look after orphans and widows in their distress
and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James 1:27

Let us remember that by giving as we have prospered, we can enable others to hear the precious words of our Savior.

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Matthew 11:28-30

MY BLESSINGS

Directions: What great blessings we enjoy in the Lord! Our daily lives should be ones of continuous thankfulness for all we have. In the space below, make a list of the blessings you enjoy today.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

*I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill,
I will send down showers in season;
there will be showers of blessing.*

Ezekiel 34:26

SCRIPTURES TO LOOK UP THIS WEEK

Directions: Look up the following scriptures and write a summary for each.

Hebrews 7:1-4 _____

Hebrews 13:5 _____

Job 31:24-25 _____

Proverbs 3:9-10 _____

Proverbs 11:24-26 _____

James 1:5 _____

James 1:17 _____

John 3:27 _____
