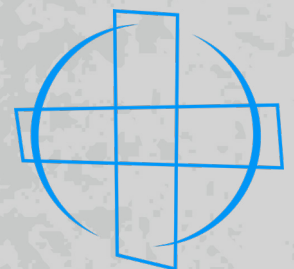


JANUARY
2022

Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

FOLLOW



ADULT CONNECT
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

Happy New Year! Our theme for this year is FOLLOW. Jesus said in Matthew, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." In this Social Media culture, there is the opportunity to "follow" people and celebrities via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Podcasts, YouTube, and the list goes on with new platforms coming out, to the point where often times we are fixed on what the next post will be from them. We become interested in what they say about various topics in many ways adopting their point of view all the while neglecting what it means to Follow Christ. Following Christ and His posts (the Bible) should be our focus daily. He should be who we follow.

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

This is a "new" year. That statement is packed with opportunity and challenges as well. The idea is that it has not existed before or that it is better than the previous. All this is true. That word "new" has a spiritual application as well. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation," for starters. Lamentations declares His mercies are new every morning, speaking of the faithfulness of God. Knowing this, there is the opportunity set before for us to surrender to follow Christ in a deeper and more meaningful way this New Year, to witness, pray, read His Word, give, participate in missions, meet needs in the community, and more as we FOLLOW.

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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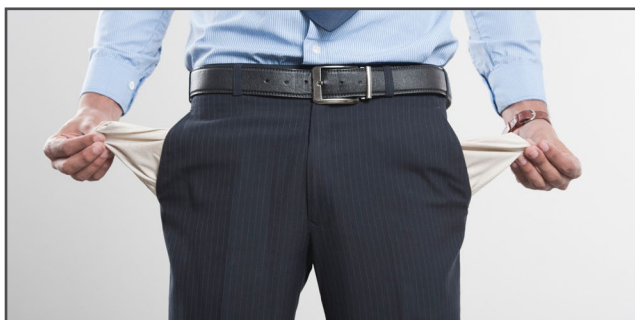


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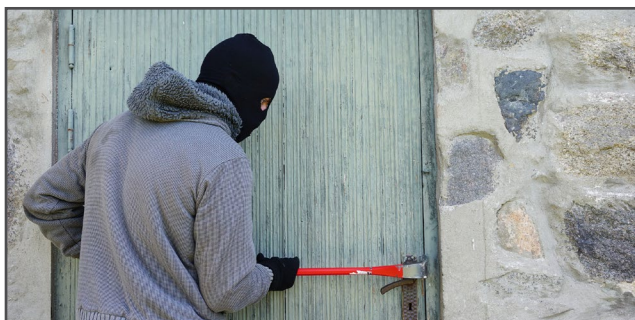


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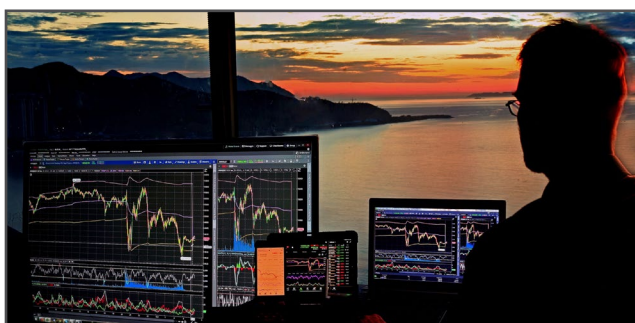


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*Following God's Plan for Giving:
The Model
Genesis 28:20-22*

Focal Verse:

"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."

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Genesis 28:22

Introduce

Known affectionately to many as “God’s Businessman,” Robert G. LeTourneau (1888-1969) dedicated himself to serving the Lord throughout his career whether by the proclamation of the gospel during his public speaking engagements or by sacrificially giving much of his fortune to finance ministry. In his autobiography, LeTourneau writes, “Some people think I’m all mixed up—that you can’t serve the Lord and business, too, but that’s just the point. God needs businessmen as partners as well as preachers.”*



Although he never graduated high school, he became a machinist *par excellence* and a prodigious inventor. He held almost 300 patents for heavy earth-moving equipment—such as the bulldozer and scraper. Developing a multi-million-dollar company despite the Great Depression, he supplied 70% of the earth-moving equipment used by Allied Forces in World War 2.**

LeTourneau’s success did not stem from his own willpower or ingenuity, but the total commitment of every area of his life to the Lord. He allowed God to use him to reach the downtrodden on skid row as much as the businessman who attended one of his lectures. He had the right perspective, for he realized that “we can be His instruments, but only God can work the wonders.”* LeTourneau explained that for this reason he has dedicated 90% of his “personal and company income to the cause of Christ.” In everything with which the Lord had blessed him, LeTourneau pondered this question, “Not how much of *my* money I give to God, but how much of *His* money I keep for myself.” He rightly saw himself as a steward or caretaker of the vast resources which God had entrusted to him. Therefore, he did not selfishly view the money as his and try to keep as much as possible. Rather, he sought where God would have him to invest it most effectively to grow the kingdom while keeping a small amount on which to live reasonably.

Recounting his first public speaking engagement to the Chamber of Commerce in Peoria, Illinois, at the height of the Great Depression, he recalled feeling apprehensive and uncertain about what he should say. Still, he used this public forum as a platform

Introduce

to share his testimony! Using an analogy with which businessmen could relate, he postulated how they would only be interested in investing in a reliable product if it always worked and consistently sold. The church, LeTourneau surmised, must have the same approach to ministry. The church must always display the righteous transformation produced in Christ and consistently proclaim the gospel twenty-four seven! We must always live out our faith for everyone to see.

Admittedly, he acknowledged his speech wasn't well received at the time. But it did spur him to think about his own words and whether he truly practiced them. In conversing with his wife, Evelyn, he averred, "We claim to be in partnership with God, but we aren't really. We have a good year, and we give Him a tithe as His share. In the old days a tithe was forced on people, and they had to give ten percent of their income to God whether they wanted to or not. Now we aren't compelled to give to God. It's all voluntary. The only thing is, when we consider what God has done for us, we ought to do better for Him out of gratitude than the doubters had to do by law."*

LeTourneau isn't denigrating the practice of tithing. He has put it into perspective. The tithe, or 10% of our gross income, is only a starting point for giving back to the Lord what He has graciously given us. All we have belongs to Him. Therefore, we must diligently seek how He wants us to use it for His glory. Let us not weigh how little we can give to the Lord and how much we can keep for ourselves, but let us assess how much of His resources He wants us to invest in the work to which He has called us. Let us follow the model He has given us in Scripture as we seek how He wants us to invest His resources with which He has entrusted us.

Key
Question

How much of the resources that God has given you do you invest in the ministries to which He has called you through His church?

In Reference



*R. G. LeTourneau, *Mover of Men and Mountains* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), pp. 1, 90-91, and 203;

**LeTourneau University, "The Machines," available from <https://www.letu.edu/library/rg-museum.html>.

The Purpose

The Old Testament clearly describes that everything on earth belongs to God. For this reason, Moses reminds Israel that “indeed the heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it” ([Deut 10:14](#); see also [1 Chron 29:11](#) and [Psalm 24:1](#)). As followers of Christ, therefore, we function as stewards or caretakers of God’s creation—in terms of both the natural ([Gen 1:28-30](#)) and financial ([Prov 3:9](#)) resources which He has entrusted us as well as the dissemination of the gospel ([1 Cor 4:1-2](#)) and the gifts of grace He has bestowed upon us through His Son ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). A steward

functions as a representative of the Master’s business as well as the caretaker for his property and possessions. Since God already owns everything, we acknowledge His Lordship when we give our tithes and offerings—returning a portion to Him from that which He has blessed us and has allowed us to utilize to provide for the needs



of our families. Thus, the tithes and offerings that we give belong wholly to the Lord. In fact, Leviticus 27:30 explicitly asserts that “all the tithes of the land, whether of the seed of the land or the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s. It is holy to the Lord.”

At some point in our lives, we have or will have thought about saving for retirement to ensure that we have ample resources to live beyond the Social Security portion deducted from our annual salaries. Generally, we have retirement plans, like 401Ks, into which we contribute a portion of our yearly earnings. Unless we have the expertise to invest properly, we probably entrust our money to a brokerage firm which has skilled investors who work on our behalf. Although we may pay them a small fee or percentage for their work, the money we place into these accounts technically remains ours to do with it as we please. These investors only safeguard it and make appropriate investments which theoretically should produce a high yield or return. Similarly, we function as God’s representatives who invest the money which He has entrusted us!

Instruct

He can still do whatever He pleases with the resources He has given us, but He expects us to invest it in the way He leads so that it produces a high rate of return for His glory ([Matt 25:14-30](#))!

How do you invest the resources in which God has entrusted you? What yield have you seen God produce in your life?

Question
1

We are not only to give because God has commanded us to do so ([Mark 12:17](#)), but also because we love Him and want to show our gratitude for the salvation that He has freely given us ([2 Cor 9:7](#); [John 14:15](#)). Through His commands, the Lord notes the purposes of our tithes and offerings directed to Him. First, they support ministries that impact the community through the local church, such as providing for widows and orphans who cannot support themselves and have no family to assist them ([Deut 14:28-29](#); [1 Tim 5:3-16](#); [Jas 1:27](#)). Second, they provide resources to support full-time staff who help organize and oversee the ministry of the local church as well as missionaries so they can focus on spreading the gospel effectively just as the Levites did in the Old Testament ([Num 18:21-32](#); [1 Cor 9:7-14](#); [1 Tim 5:17-18](#)). Even those called into full-time ministry such as the Levites, however, were required to give their tithes to the Lord as well ([Num 18:26](#)). Finally, tithes and offerings, particularly collected during specific campaigns in Exodus and Nehemiah, facilitate the maintenance of the temple where the people met for the worship of the Lord.

The Plan

The word tithe literally means 10%, but this, in fact, is the minimum which should be given. In total, Israel gave on average around one-quarter of her income to tithes and offerings when one counts both the special offerings and annual tithes outlined in Scripture. For instance, [Deuteronomy 14:22-27](#) mentions a tithe from the yearly income that a person receives—in this agrarian economy it comes from the produce collected during the harvest. Furthermore, [Deuteronomy 26:1-4](#) specifies that the tithe should not be merely from the leftovers, but from the firstfruits of the harvest. Similarly, [Leviticus 27:26](#) requires Israel to dedicate their firstborn animals as an offering to the Lord. In addition to the tithe on yearly income, another tithe was offered in support of the Levitical priests who represented the Lord by serving the people. When God divided the Promised Land amongst the twelve tribes at the conquest of Canaan, the

Levites did not receive a portion as their inheritance and, therefore, had no way of providing for themselves. God wanted them free from the constraints of continually seeking provisions so that they might concentrate on ministering on His behalf to the people. So, having called them as full-time ministers, God instituted this tithe to support the Levites and their families to free them for the work to which He has called them ([Num 18:31-32](#)). Finally, every third year Israel collected an offering dedicated to helping the poor and destitute—in other words an offering for ministry within the community which sought to meet the most pressing needs ([Deut 14:28-29](#)).



The Priority

Although we live in a money-based economy today, the same principle still applies to us as it did to Israel several millennia ago. The Lord wants us to set aside at least 10% of our gross income to return to Him through the local church to facilitate ministry. This principle applies regardless of how much or how little we make! It requires us to trust the Lord and make Him the center of our budget and financial planning. Consequently, we should budget our expenditures based upon the income God has given us so that we can live within our means—to do so requires restraint and self-control. As soon as we receive income, we should set aside God's portion before we do anything else! At times, this means that we must prioritize our expenses, purchase only what we need, and structure contracts in such a way to attain services that don't exceed our income. We may not always get what we *want*, but God has promised that when we follow His plan we will always have what we *need* ([Matt 6:19-34](#)). However, we live in a society that lacks self-control, seeks instant gratification, and fails to plan; thus, personal desires become misconstrued as must haves! We must learn to follow God's plan, viewing the world through His eyes, so we can truly see what is important in life and live within the means with which He has given us.

How well do you exercise self-control in your expenditures and planning a budget?

Question
2

Instruct

Developing a budget is the most practical way to invest the money God has given us to oversee. When Jesus discusses the commitment needed to follow Him, He implicitly endorses planning or budgeting when He contends, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it” ([Luke 14:28](#))? A budget allows us to make wise investments and prove good stewards of our limited resources. Although balancing income with expenditures represents the primary purpose of budgeting, we should always begin our planning with prayer, seeking wisdom and instruction from the Lord to make investments with eternal significance. Therefore, budgeting helps us to live within our means, provide for our basic needs, and save for unexpected expenditures all the while being mindful to use our resources for the glory of the Lord.

Furthermore, praying through our budgets enables us to identify what’s most important in life by keeping us focused on Christ. Some of the modern conveniences to which we have grown accustomed are not truly necessities when viewed through the filter of Christ. For instance, cable or streaming entertainment platforms are not



ITEM	BUDGET	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE
Rent	\$1,200.00	\$1,200.00	\$0.00
Food	\$675.00	\$726.45	+\$51.45
Gas	\$100.00	\$89.15	-\$10.85
Entertainment	\$225.00	\$174.38	-\$50.62
	\$150.00	\$150.00	\$0.00

necessary for life especially if they supplant other essential needs. But we often treat them as if they are, accruing debt in other areas and decrying our lack of funds even to the point of sometimes refraining from generously giving unto the Lord. If such a purchase causes financial strain, simply get rid of it. Even if we do have the finances to support such a service,

we must still seek wisdom from the Lord to determine if this constitutes the best investment we ought to make.

In addition, prayer gives us wisdom in using our finances ([Jas 1:5](#)). At times, we may need to find cheaper alternatives to service and products which fit our budgets. While at other times, our research may inform us that the more expensive product proves a better value because it is more durable and will last longer. On one hand, we may need to delay projects or purchases to have the finances in place, so we don’t go into

debt ([Rom 13:7-8](#)). On the other hand, we may need to purchase or replace something rather than repair it because in the long run it will end up costing more money. To make a budget requires work and it takes time to examine all the options. But it also requires discipline to abide by it, whether that means removing unnecessary things from our lives or rejecting the urge to succumb to our impulses. God will give us both the wisdom and discipline to use our resources wisely if we earnestly seek Him!

How has God given you wisdom to invest wisely?

Question
3

Still, we must make tough choices from time to time. If we have a limited entertainment budget, for example, we may be required to decide whether we go with friends to dinner, to a movie or concert, or to a sporting event. Furthermore, just because we have the money doesn't mean that we need to spend it all! We should make preparations for retirement ([Prov 6:6-11](#)) as well as for emergency expenditures we may incur from time to time ([Eccl 11:1-2](#)). But we shouldn't hoard money, however, as if we don't trust the Lord. Instead, we should seek how He wants us to invest it prudently ([Matt 6:19-21](#)). There is nothing wrong with either saving or spending money. We just must do it with the caveat that it belongs to the Lord, so we must ask, "Does the way I invest my resources please and honor Him?"

We live in a society which generally feels entitled to certain privileges and expects a particular standard of living. Rarely do we see others who live sacrificially ([Luke 21:1-4](#)). God hasn't called us to live destitute and impoverished lives, but He has called us to live wisely and use our possessions for His glory. Many, however, excuse their paltry giving unto the Lord because of their lack of finances. They attempt to justify it by arguing they can't afford to give or they can only give a little when, in reality, they've simply failed to plan and they lack self-control which has led to a staggering amount of debt for many households. God wants us to trust that He will provide. And when He does provide, He expects us to use those resources wisely to make an eternal impact in the kingdom. Thus, it requires us to follow His plan to be good stewards of the resources He has given us.

How does giving your tithes and offerings first when receiving an income show trust in the Lord? How have you seen His faithfulness when you have done so?

Question
4

The Permanence

Some may attempt to argue that tithing reflects an Old Testament practice that no longer applies to us because Christ came to free us from the constraints of the law.

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish *but to fulfill.*”

Matthew 5:17

This, however, misunderstands Jesus’ intentions which He plainly outlines in [Matthew 5:17-19](#). He Himself teaches that He did not come to abolish or make the law invalid; rather, He came to fulfill or complete it. As a result, Jesus demonstrated through His righteousness the proper way to interpret the law and practice it. Moreover, He confirms that not

even the smallest letter of the law will pass away and “whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” ([Matt 5:19](#)). Clearly, Jesus affirms the validity and permanence of the Old Testament—not in a legalistic way, but rather as a display of God’s transformative power in our lives.

Consequently, the principles behind the Old Testament law are still applicable today through Christ ([2 Tim 3:16-17](#)). Thus, we should uphold the principles associated with the law—not in a legalistic sense to earn favor or status, but because we love the Lord and want to honor Him with our righteousness. In describing this transformation, Paul points out “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” ([Rom 8:4](#)). In Christ, therefore, we don’t look at the least we can do to eek by, following the law to the letter; we follow the Spirit who helps us know the mind of God and leads us to obediently abide by His expectations ([Rom 8:27](#)).

Although the New Testament rarely uses the word tithe ([Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12; Heb 7:5](#)), Jesus does not invalidate the practice. Instead, His words actually support it. When the Pharisees questioned Him about the legality of giving taxes to Rome, Jesus responds, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the

things that are God's" ([Matt 22:21](#)). Even though Jesus doesn't specify whether this is a tithe or temple tax, the principle remains clear. We should give to God what belongs to Him starting with our very lives as living sacrifices ([Rom 12:1](#); [2 Cor 8:5](#)) as well as our time, talents, and tithes. The 10% allotment for a tithe in the Old Testament provides the starting point for us to give cheerfully and generously as the Spirit leads.

The Precedent

Even before the law codified the practice, Abraham ([Gen 14:18-24](#)) and Jacob ([Gen 28:20-22](#)) responded voluntarily with gratitude for what the Lord had done in their lives by giving a tenth of all their possessions either to His servant or to Him directly. These acts further cement the continuation of the practice of tithing by following a precedent voluntarily established prior to the compulsion of the law! In other words, we should give a tithe of all we have because of our thankfulness for what God has done and will do for us! We



*"And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies
into your hand."
Genesis 14:20*

don't tithe *only* because God has demanded it! We give voluntarily from our sincerest gratitude.

Let's take a closer look at the precedent Jacob established in [Genesis 28:20-22](#), so we can rightly apply it to our own lives. While fleeing from his vengeful brother Esau from whom he had stolen his blessing from their father, Jacob pauses to rest during which time God speaks to him through a dream while he slept. In response to God's holiness and benevolent promises, Jacob then awoke and made "a vow" with the Lord ([Gen 28:20](#)). In this context, to make "a vow" signifies a confession; thus, Jacob makes a profession of faith whereby he begins his personal relationship with the Lord. To this point in Jacob's life, God has been mentioned as the God of Abraham and Isaac, but a relationship with the Lord is not something hereditary, passed down from generation to generation.

For this reason, God spoke directly to Jacob through this dream and offered him a personal invitation to have a relationship through which he too could participate in the covenant with his forefathers. Prior to this encounter with the Lord, Jacob had

Instruct

defrauded his brother, lied to his father, and was forced to flee his homeland, so he desperately needed a personal relationship through which God could transform him. Consequently, on this night Jacob surrendered his life to the Lord as his God ([Gen 28:21](#)).

To make his “vow,” Jacob employs a conditional sentence: “If God will be with me, and keep me . . . and give me bread to eat and clothing to wear . . . then the Lord shall be my God.” At face value in modern English, it looks as if Jacob is stating that his relationship with the Lord will depend upon what He will do for him. In Hebrew, however, the word “if,” when used in this context, carries with it the force of “because”; therefore, *because* God has done these things for Jacob already, when people see the stone, they will be reminded of His faithfulness. Thus, Jacob’s vow demonstrates four areas of dependence upon God: 1) guidance (God will be with me), 2) protection (keep me), 3) provision (give me bread . . . and clothing), and 4) His personal relationship (the Lord shall be my God).

Like Jacob, we depend upon God for everything that we have: we depend upon Him for wisdom and direction, to meet our basic human needs, and for our salvation since we cannot save ourselves. Therefore, we shouldn’t bargain or make deals with God that specify “if” He does “X” then we will respond by doing “Y.” For example, we should not say, “If He blesses us with a particular amount of resources, then we’ll give this amount.” It doesn’t work that way! We should respond to God’s faithfulness in the same way that Jacob did.

Why should our tithes not be conditional based upon what God will do for us but rather a response to what He has already done?

Question
5

Not only does Jacob leave a physical marker (stone) for this occasion, but he also pledges to return a tenth of all that God will give him ([Gen 28:22](#)). Jacob establishes the precedent of giving God a tenth of his income whatever that may be. At this point, Jacob has no guarantee that God will enrich him monetarily in exactly the same way as his forefathers; however, he doesn’t bargain with God and say when I have so much livestock, gold, or precious jewels, then I will tithe to you a tenth. On the contrary, Jacob says, “And of all that You give me I will surely give You a tenth.” Moreover, in contrast to his grandfather Abraham, this is not a one-time gift, but as God blesses and

provides for him, Jacob will continue to return a tenth to the Lord which is inherent in the way that this is phrased in the original language. As this lesson draws to a close, think about all the ways in which God has demonstrated His faithfulness to you—not just financially, but through His guidance, protection, provision, and salvation. Is it too small a thing to trust God when we tithe as an act of worship that He will continue to remain faithful to us in every way?

Why should tithing be one of our regular acts of worship?

Question
6

Inspire

Over the course of this month, may we honestly evaluate our giving in relation to the plan and precedent God has given us in Scripture. We must first begin by recognizing that God has blessed us as stewards of His money. Like Abraham, Jacob, and R. G. LeTourneau, let us seek how the Lord wants us to invest His money in the expansion of His kingdom. May we never fall into the legalistic trap of focusing on how little we can give to satisfy a requirement. Rather, let us see how much we can generously and cheerfully give as an ecstatic response to God's grace and blessing toward us. To do so means that we must follow the plan which He has given us in His Word concerning our finances and possessions!

Incorporate

How do you make tithes and offerings to the Lord the center of your household budget?

Why should we not merely look at the "least" we can give when setting aside our tithes and offerings? How did God use R. G. LeTourneau's testimony to speak to you in the introduction?

How does the way that you give tithes and offerings through the church show your gratitude to the Lord for what He has done? How does it indicate your trust in Him?

Journal: Document God's Work

January 9, 2022



Following God's Plan for Giving:
The Method
Matthew 6:19-34

Focal Verse:

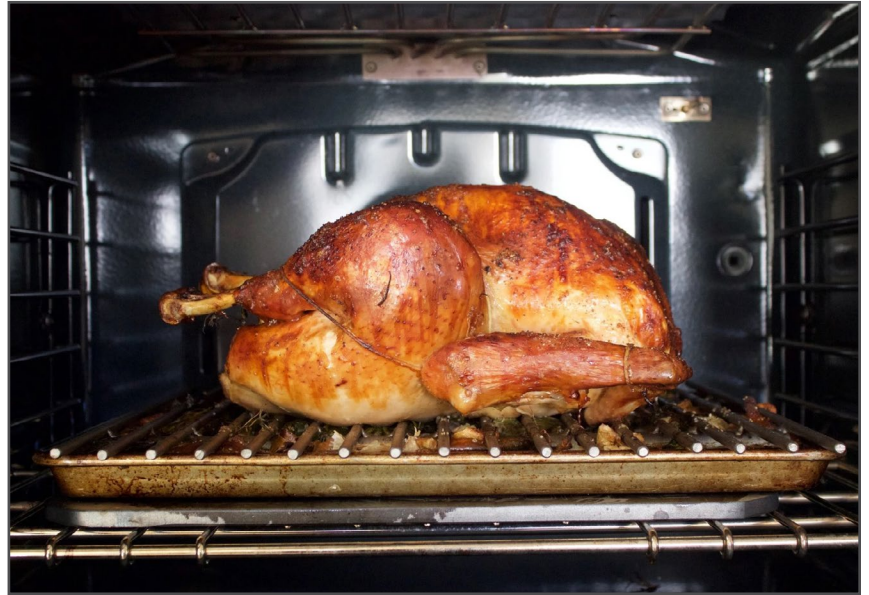
"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

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Matthew 6:21

Introduce

If you were fortunate in a year defined by supply shortages, you were able to find a turkey for your family's holiday meal. Over the years, most of you have probably been able to cook turkeys problem-free because you have been properly trained in the culinary art by parents or grandparents, you read and follow directions, and you use commonsense. Some, however, cannot make such boasts. So, for them, Butterball sponsors a hotline every year during the holiday season to answer questions consumers may have, helping them safely prepare their turkeys for consumption. As a result,



the hotline's operators have documented some interesting conversations. Wishing to complain and give them a piece of his mind, one gentleman called in frustration because the "cold water-thaw method" listed on the label simply did not work. Seeking further clarification, the operator asked him to explain exactly what process he had used to thaw the turkey. To which he informed her that he had placed it in his pool and, when he returned, he found it missing!*

Another caller dialed the hotline concerned about oil that had gotten on the bird while he was carving it. He continued to explain that the oil lubricating his chainsaw blade had dripped onto it and wondered if that would hurt! The operator quickly retorted, "Potentially, but either way, if you take a chainsaw to food make sure to check the labels of everything that may be coming into contact with your meal. And maybe invest in an electric carving knife instead." A Kentucky mother who wanted to teach her children the value of cooking summoned them to help her prepare their turkey. When the bird came out of the oven, it had a perfect "golden-brown" hue. But when she began carving it, she noticed "strange bright red" streaks running throughout the meat. She called the hotline in a panic, but later found that her son had "helped" her by stuffing the bird with "Lego blocks."**

On his radio show in 1995, Paul Harvey tells of an older woman who called the hotline to ask about the safety of preparing and eating a turkey which had been in her freezer

Introduce

for twenty-three years. The operator communicated that if the bird had been properly frozen and had not been thawed at any point it may be alright to eat. With a brief pause, the operator then informed her that it would likely have no flavor, however. The woman succinctly interjected, “Well, that’s what we thought. We’ll just give it to the church.”***

What does giving God our “leftovers” or the things in which we find little or no value say about the priority we place on Him versus the priority we place on other things in our lives? Hopefully, none of us would ever consider bringing a twenty-three-year-old turkey to church or any other items we just want to get rid of! God wants our best. He wants our first-fruits, not our leftovers or the used items we no longer want. Jesus warns us that we cannot serve two masters because we will hate one and love the other. Moreover, money can easily become our master if we don’t maintain a kingdom perspective where we invest in the eternal by seeking the Lord and putting Him first. As Jesus clearly points out, what we do with our money and possessions and where we choose to invest our priorities indicate what we value or treasure in our hearts.

Key
Question

What does your perspective about your finances say about what you treasure?

In Reference



*Kelly Bryant, “34 Funny Butterball Hotline Calls to Share This Thanksgiving,” *Readers’ Digest* (Sept 22, 2021), available from rd.com;

**Rudro Chakrabarti, “The Butterball Turkey Talk-Line’s Most Legendary Panic Calls,” *MoneyWise* (Nov 23, 2020), available from moneywise.com;

***No Author Given, *From Every Angle: A Compendium of Stewardship Resources* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing, 2000), p. 166-167.

Matthew 6:19-21

A STEWARD HAS THE RIGHT PLAN:

On a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus continues His teaching we often refer to as the Sermon on the Mount. In this section, He defines what we should have as our true purpose and motivation by providing us with a plan for investing our resources (time, talents, and tithes) appropriately. He cautions us against laying **up treasures on earth which moth and rust can destroy and thieves can steal** (v. 19). In contrast, Jesus urges us to make eternal investments by storing our **treasures in heaven** (v. 20). He astutely explains that those things we value most will be that in which we make the most significant investment of our resources, time, and energies; therefore, He declares that **where our treasure is so there our hearts will be also** (v. 21).

As we all know, nothing on earth lasts forever, yet many people still seek things which instantly gratify their momentary urges rather than looking at the long-term goals and effects. We ought to plan wisely, however, seeking to make investments that have the most eternal impact as directed by the Lord rather than relishing things which merely promise instant gratification. Several years ago when financing the purchase of my home, toward the end of the process the mortgage company offered me the choice between receiving a \$400 cash payment upfront or 0.25% less for the annual percentage rate for the entire life of the thirty-year loan. Unbelievably, many people don't think about the consequences and opt for the \$400 as instant gratification, but they pay many times more in interest over the life of the loan costing them much more financially. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves what significance do the decisions I make have in terms of kingdom value? In what would God have me invest my funds or how would He have me use the resources He has given me to glorify Him through His kingdom's work?

What are some things that we can do that will make an eternal impact and have eternal value?

Question
1

It's certainly not wrong to enjoy life and have possessions here on earth if we view them in terms of the impact they can have on the kingdom of God. Living in Texas without much good public transportation, we all need a vehicle to accomplish routine tasks in our daily lives. As much as we want to buy a car that lasts our entire lives,

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we know that it will eventually break down and cease to run no matter how well we maintain it. It can take just one accident, one hailstorm, or one mechanical problem to sideline the car permanently. Now, some automotive parts have become so hard to obtain because of a lack of computer chips and problems with shipping. The major investment for which we have worked so hard will eventually fail us!

Even though things may fail at times, they are gracious gifts from the Lord which we should use to glorify Him by making eternal investments. Although nothing on earth is eternal, we can still use it like the car in this example to impact others: 1) we can use it to bring people to church and 2) we can use it to minister to others who may need rides to work, school, doctor's appointments, pharmacies, and grocery stores and share



the gospel with them while we have them as a captive audience. Ultimately, it's not about having the most luxurious car that has all the features, but it's about using it to honor God and expand His kingdom while we have the chance. If God gives us a car with all the bells and whistles, then praise Him; if He doesn't, then He has still blessed us! In either case,

we should use what He has given us to glorify Him. One day the car will be in a heap in a junkyard, rusting away and being used for salvage. It's what we do with it now to make an eternal investment that matters!

This perspective of eternal investment should influence everything we do! Most of the time when we hear the word **treasure** we immediately think about money. In our world, we should certainly invest the money God has given us wisely; we should tithe and give offerings as prescribed by Scripture, but we also ought to make wise decisions about how we invest the rest of our money. Many times, for example, we buy the newest electronics when the old ones work just fine. As a result, we can easily find ourselves greatly in debt when we should have the self-control to live within the means which God has given us and wait for the right time to make a purchase. Sometimes, however, we need the newer electronics to facilitate opportunities for ministry and God

has given us the resources to purchase them. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: how does the newest version help in proclaiming the gospel and do I really need the latest, greatest gadget to make the most significant impact or add value to my life? Allow God to lead you in making such purchases rather than your personal desires.

Why is investing in new technologies and facilities sometimes the best course to make an eternal impact?

Question
2

Treasure, however, is not *just* about money or resources. It can be the talents and abilities which God has given us. Are we serving Him daily? It can also reflect the decisions we make about our education, our career, and the place in which we live. We must ask what opportunities we have in each of these areas to glorify God and further His kingdom. Which of the opportunities makes the most difference and leaves a legacy that honors the Lord? It's not always about what's right or wrong, but how much of an impact that we can have! We don't have to be penny-pinchers or free spenders who become indebted; we should make decisions based on how well we can serve the Lord with what we currently have.

What is your treasure and what do you value most? How can you use these things to honor the Lord?

Question
3

Matthew 6:22-24

A STEWARD HAS THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:

In the next two verses, Jesus introduces a difficult proverbial saying from that time period when He states that **the eye is the lamp of the body** (v. 22). The ancients thought **the eye** to be the source of **light**. Because they thought **light** emanated from the person via **the eye**, it revealed what was on the inside—in particular their motives and morals. For this reason, Jesus says that **if the eye is good** then the rest of **the body will be full**



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of light; in other words, the person will have good character and morals. In contrast, **if the eye is bad**, it revealed the sinful condition and motives of the soul (v. 23). If a person were evil, then their **eye** would be **full of darkness**. In this context, we know Jesus is speaking metaphorically because we can't tell by looking into someone's eyes whether they are **good** or evil just like we can't see their **heart** and discern their motives. By examining the outcome of their actions, however, we can sometimes see their motives and their true character. Taken together, therefore, the metaphor of the **heart** and **eye** signifies that we need to have a proper perspective and walk alertly in the will of God by doing that which is right!

Jesus has already pointed out, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" ([Matt 5:16](#)). Here, He is reminding us that we are to be an example in the way that we walk by having a Christ-like perspective in all things. In Ephesians 5:8, Paul emphasizes this same point, "For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light." When we fail to see things from a Christ-like perspective, it can cause us to stumble and fall because of impure motives and our failure to make investments which glorify the Lord. Impure motives and a bad character will always impact our decisions negatively because we will base them upon selfish reasons and look at what benefits us the most right now rather than what glorifies the Lord and has the greatest impact ([1 Tim 6:10](#)). Even if we don't have a selfish motivation, chances become great that we will be blind to the true purposes of the Lord because we will not see the big picture clearly.

Matthew 6:25-32

A STEWARD KNOWS WHO PROVIDES:

Jesus begins the next section with the command **not to worry about our life**. The way this command is written in the Greek has more of the connotation to "stop worrying." Because Jesus knows our hearts, He knows our propensity to **worry** over the things that we can't control; therefore, He tells us to stop worrying and trust God. When we have the right motives, the right perspective, and we earnestly seek our heavenly Father through prayer, fasting, and authentic service, we **don't** have anything about which to **worry** because He will provide. Jesus, therefore, gives us three areas in which we have no need to **worry**: 1) **what we will eat**, 2) **what we will drink**, and 3) **what we will wear** (i.e., **put on**). Thus, we have no need to **worry** about any of our

physical needs. As the Creator, God provides the sustenance for **life**. We aren't entitled to receive physical resources from the Lord, but He graciously provides for our basic needs! Neither does His provision entitle us simply to sit, do nothing, and wait for something to fall into our laps. In fact, the Bible clearly states, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" ([2 Thess 3:10](#)). When we work as God has directed and we trust Him, He will provide abundantly in every situation.

What things typically worry you in life?

Question
4

In the model prayer, Jesus invites us to ask the Father to meet our needs necessary for **life** ([Matt 6:11](#)). In more modern terms, this focuses more on the finances to provide for our physical needs. Because we use a monetary system more than we rely on bartering, God promises to enable us to make a living wage which can provide for our families, even though at times we may struggle in that pursuit which requires us to rely even more heavily upon Him. This doesn't mean that we won't ever lose our jobs from downsizing or restructuring; it doesn't mean that we will become millionaires. It doesn't mean that we do not need



to plan for our physical needs—even in circumstances beyond our control. Rather, it means that we must learn to trust God and rely on His provision in all circumstances. Jesus follows this command **not to worry** with a rhetorical question: **Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?** He wants His followers to understand that **life** consists of more than just **food** or physical needs; therefore, He shifts their focus back to their spiritual needs and their relationship with the heavenly Father. We can observe how Jesus lives by this principle when He resists temptation by telling the devil that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" ([Matt 4:4](#)). Consequently, we find true contentment not in having our mere physical needs met, but in our relationship with Christ.

As humans, our greatest desire in **life** is to have a purpose and a place to belong in which we feel loved and useful. The pursuit for physical goods can only lead to

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disappointment because we will never attain enough to satisfy. Instead, we will always crave more no matter how abundant our resources may be. In Christ, however, we find a purpose beyond the physical and a Savior who loves us more than anyone in this world! When we concentrate on our spiritual relationship with our heavenly Father, we will never lack the basics and always be content no matter how little or how much we may perceive that we have.

Why is it more important to concentrate on our spiritual needs and our relationship with our Father than our physical needs?

Question
5

Jesus now gives two examples from nature showing how much God truly cares for us. First, He points to **the birds of the air** (v. 26). **Birds** live as scavengers; they must hunt



and gather their food daily. They aren't like humans because they **neither** plant crops **nor** harvest them to store in **barns**. On the contrary, they live from day to day depending upon the generosity of the **heavenly Father** to provide. When we **look at the birds**, we observe that they never lack or go hungry, but the Lord always provides abundantly for them. They rely on

Him and go about their daily business. Therefore, Jesus ends this verse by asking a rhetorical question to emphasize our **value** to God: **Are you not of more value than they?** If God cares about the **birds**, how much more does He care about us?

How has God shown you even greater care than that of the natural world?

Question
6

Next, Jesus challenges us **not** to **worry** about the things over which we have no control, but to turn them over to the Lord. He illustrates His point through another question: **which of us by worrying can add an inch to his height** (v. 27). If we **worry**

about things over which we have no control, what does it accomplish? It can cause high levels of stress which can lead to many serious health problems: anxiety, depression, mental fatigue, insomnia, high blood pressure, and even heart problems. It can also cause problems in our relationships because we can become obsessive, withdrawn, and lack trust. Nothing good can come from worrying! We should be conscientious about our **life** and plans, but we shouldn't **worry** and obsess over things out of our control. Thus, we shouldn't **worry** about other people's actions or response to our service in the Lord; we don't have any control over them, but we do have control over how we respond to the Lord. In addition, we shouldn't **worry** about things in the past; we can't change them. We should learn from them and move forward.

Second, Jesus uses the **lilies of the field** to demonstrate how God provides for us (v. 28). The lilies **grow** in the wild; they don't weave or knit (i.e., **toil or spin**) clothes for themselves, but God abundantly provides the water and nutrients for them to blossom into beautiful flowers beyond compare over any piece of cloth. In fact, Jesus states that **even Solomon** with all his wealth **was not** dressed **like one of these** flowers (v. 29). Just as He did with **the birds of the air**, Jesus ends this section by showing how much more God cares for humans above the rest of His creation. Flowers only live a little while; they are here **today** and gone **tomorrow** because they bake in the heat (i.e., **oven**). Although life is short for us too and we aren't guaranteed tomorrow, God cares infinitely more for us because He sent His Son to redeem and save us. That's how much more God cares for us than mere **birds** and flowers!

Jesus rebukes those who **worry** for being **of little faith**. When we **worry**, we essentially tell God we don't trust Him to provide for our needs and guide our steps.

As we dress for an important event, many of us may **worry** about what we should wear: do the clothes match, is it the right outfit for the occasion, is it fashionable, or does it make me look fat? We may change clothes a dozen times before we find the right outfit. We certainly shouldn't dress sloppily or intentionally mismatch our clothes, but worrying about what we wear often distracts us from having the right focus. We're more worried about what others may think than the purpose of



the event. Jesus bids us **not** to **worry**, but to focus on what's most important: God's righteousness and His kingdom. When we **worry**, we dismiss God's leadership and attempt to do things on our own which usually creates more problems in the long run. Trust God and allow Him to guide us, especially in our finances!

How does or has worry over your finances and investments affected the way you relate and respond to the Lord?

Question
7

Jesus repeats the command to stop worrying about **what** we will **eat**, **what** we will **drink**, and **what** we will **wear** (v. 31). He compares those who **worry** about **all these things** to **the Gentiles** (v. 32). Their gods couldn't provide the **things** that they needed and they had nowhere to turn in instances of drought, famine, or disease; their gods were incapable of helping them no matter how much they pleaded, prayed, or paid in offerings! **The Gentiles**, therefore, always lived in great uncertainty—not knowing if they could ever please their gods enough to receive a favorable response. Praise the Lord, however, that we have a God who hears us, cares for us, loves us, and provides for us in all circumstances. For this reason, Jesus reminds us that our **heavenly Father knows** what we need, so we shouldn't **worry**.

When we look at the world around us which pursues wealth and material possessions and is consumed by anxiety over these things, we will observe several negative characteristics. First, the world will always complain. They are never satisfied with what they have. If they lack something, they will complain they don't have enough or that they have become victims of injustice. They complain rather than work to overcome their circumstances in accordance with God's plan. If they have an abundance, they will usually complain they need even more or that what they have isn't good enough. They need the latest technology; they need the car with the most gadgets; they need to travel first-class; they need a higher-paying job, and so forth.

This leads directly to a second negative characteristic which is fueled by a spirit of competition—leading to both coveting and jealousy. Instead of being content with our lives and happy about the success of others, people become bitter. They find themselves asking, "Why don't I have these things or why haven't I achieved such success?" As a result, they tend to forget the source of their joy and take what they have been given for granted. At times, they may even feel entitled to certain things—

never showing gratitude to the Lord for what He has given them. On the contrary, we must trust the Lord and acknowledge His provision for us by showing Him our gratitude and by telling others what He has done in our lives.



How have you seen God meet the needs in your life? How have you shown Him the gratitude for that provision?

Question
8

Matthew 6:33-34

A STEWARD HAS THE RIGHT PRIORITY:

In order to succeed in life, a steward must have the right priority. As we have seen, anxiety can distract us from our true purpose by taking our focus off God and placing it onto our circumstances (see [Phil 4:10-13](#)). For this reason, Jesus commands us to **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness** (v. 33). Knowing our propensity to **worry**, He commands us one final time to stop worrying about **tomorrow** (v. 34). Instead, we should concentrate on living according to God's gracious plan today! Since **tomorrow** rests squarely in God's hands and we can do nothing to avoid the **troubles** that may arise, we must spend time pursuing our relationship with Christ daily. When we pursue Him, He will give us wisdom about how we should conduct ourselves according to His holiness and the righteous boundaries that He has set for us. At times, however, we may still have struggles and trials, but when we **seek Him first** we can overcome them without compromise. Therefore, we must learn to trust Him in all situations and surrender to Him regardless of the circumstances, particularly when it comes to our possessions, finances, and investments. When we do, we will be transformed in our devotion, content in any circumstance, and free from the anxiety which can distract us from serving Him!

How do you seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first in your financial planning?

Question
9

Because God has made us a priority in His creation by saving us through His Son and by graciously meeting our daily needs, we ought to respond by making Him the priority in our lives and seeking Him above all. This includes making Him the priority in the finances and resources He has given us—seeking how He wants us to invest our “treasure” as His stewards to make the most significant impact for His kingdom. Unfortunately, sometimes our “needs” take precedence over our service and our giving becomes merely an afterthought with what we may have left over once we’ve fulfilled our desires. God wants us to follow the right plan and have the right perspective. He wants us to trust Him with our finances, giving to Him first from what He has given us because we know that He has promised to provide for all our needs when we are faithful and put Him first in our lives.

Incorporate

How does the way that you handle your finances demonstrate your trust in the Lord?
How do you follow His plan for investing to make an eternal impact?

When you have trusted God with your finances, how has He graciously provided for you and met your most basic needs?

How does the way that you handle your finances indicate that God is the priority in your life?

January 16, 2022



*Following God's Plan for Giving:
The Means
2 Corinthians 8:1-12*

Focal Verse:

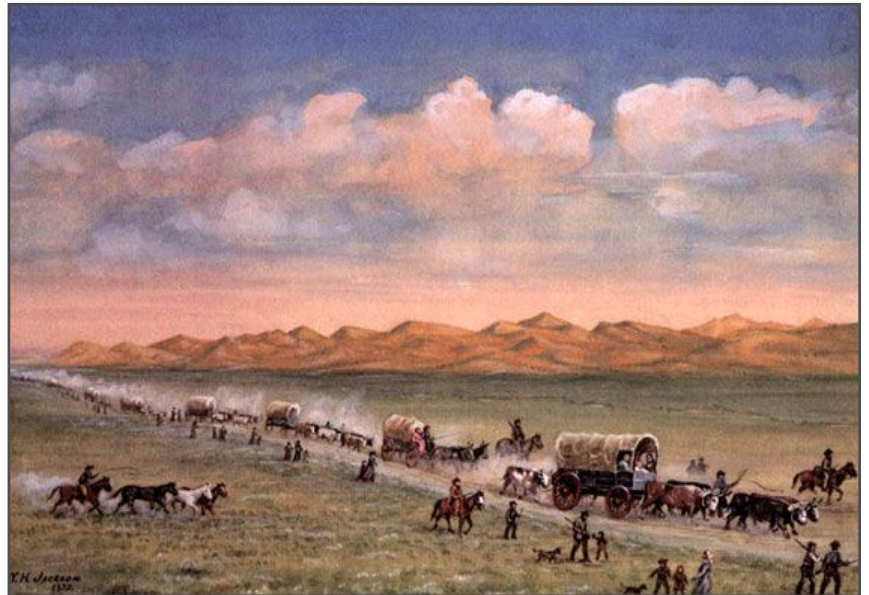
"For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."

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2 Corinthians 8:12

Introduce

After leaving the last semblance of civilization behind them in Saint Joseph, Missouri, Joseph T. Penney and his family joined a processional of other families who had set out on an arduous journey spanning several weeks that would take them across the Great Plains. Trudging ever-slowly westward and seemingly making little progress, they found themselves tired and sore from the jostling of the covered wagon that wobbled to and fro as it bounced off the occasional rock which protruded from the path and sank into the deep ruts which had scarred the earth. Caked in dust from their trek along the well-worn



roadway, the families labored hard daily to set up camp and search for food. As they followed the meandering North Platte River, their eyes finally beheld a welcomed sight as they saw the outline of a wooden fence and several buildings dotting the landscape. They had made it to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, where they could refresh themselves, rest, and replenish their supplies.

Having recuperated some from his journey, Joseph T. Penney decided to barter for some additional supplies which would help them on their trek through the high desert surrounding the Great Salt Lake Valley. Upon entering the trading post, Penney's eyes lit up when he saw all the goods he and his family could use—spare parts for the wagon, ammunition for their rifles, cold-weather clothing, and canned provisions to name a few. However, he had no money because he had used it all to buy provisions before they left Saint Joseph. Still, he gathered the supplies his family would need, hoping to strike a deal.

Penney proceeded to the clerk to find out how much these things would cost. After the clerk made a few calculations, Penney announced that he had no money with which to pay. As if on cue, he then began listing all the things he didn't have and with which he couldn't barter. Suddenly, the clerk interrupted, "I don't care about the things you don't have! What do you have that you can trade?" The clerk wisely continued, "I can't use what you don't have, but I can make a deal on what you have that I can use to re-sale

Introduce

to others.” With that advice, Penney pulled out the hides and furs of the animals which his family had hunted and consumed for food along the way. These pelts more than satisfied the payment required.

Although we don’t barter with God seeking a *quid pro quo* when we give our tithes and offerings, many of us may adopt Penney’s perspective. We may indeed try to barter with the Lord when it comes to our giving. We may say, “When or if I have this amount of money, then I will give to You.” As a result, many of us begin by announcing what we don’t have! God, however, doesn’t want us to focus on the things we don’t have; He wants us to use the things that He has given us and return a portion unto Him. In His sovereignty, God doesn’t technically need us or our finances to accomplish His will, but He graciously chooses to use us in His plan. He equips us and blesses us so that we might have the resources on which we need to live and to fulfill His will. Consequently, God expects us to use that which He has given us to serve Him. Therefore, let us follow His plan and give according to the means with which He has blessed us.

Key
Question

With what has God blessed you that you should dedicate and use for His glory?

2 Corinthians 8:1-4

GIVE GENEROUSLY:

In response to a famine in Jerusalem which caused great hardship for the church, Paul commences his challenge for the Corinthians to renew their effort to collect a special offering which they had previously begun by calling them to remember the **grace** which the Lord had shown them. He points them to a concrete example of God's **grace** tangibly demonstrated in the offering given by the **churches** in **Macedonia**. In doing so, Paul wants them to see God's **grace** at work in their sister churches—not in the spirit of human comparison which can turn into a competition, but to remind the Corinthians of what the **grace** of God looks like when faithfully applied. Literally, the text declares that **the grace of God** *has been given to* (**bestowed**) **the churches of Macedonia** (v. 1). This is significant because it identifies God as the source of their **grace** and establishes Him as the pattern for how we should live! In addition to being recipients of God's **grace** ourselves, we are also conduits who serve as stewards of His **grace** when we give. Thus, the Macedonians imitated God's **grace** through their offerings by willingly and graciously giving to meet an immediate need as the Lord directed.

Furthermore, the verb *has been given* refers to an action completed in the past, but with results that continue to be experienced in the present and into the future. Therefore, it pictures God's **grace** as consistent and never waning. Circumstances may change and the way **grace** is applied may look differently depending upon the situation, but

the fact that God acts graciously remains constant. That never changes! For example, God graciously meets our physical needs, rescues us from peril at times, provides strength to endure trials, offers comfort when we grieve, encourages us when we feel overwhelmed, gives us wisdom when we ask, equips us to serve Him, chastises us when we



sin, and corrects us when we fail. God graciously gives us what we need! Just as God

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responds with **grace** in a variety of ways, so also should we imitate Him as He leads us when it comes to our giving.

How has God shown grace to you? How has He asked you to show grace to others through your offerings and possessions?

Question
1

Sometimes, however, we fail to express **grace** to others because we have become distracted by our circumstances and have taken our eyes off Christ. A working compass will always point true North because of the earth's magnetic field regardless of where we are physically standing. Our position doesn't matter until something stronger disrupts the pull of the needle northward. However, placing something like a magnet next to a compass can distort its reading. It will no longer point North because it has become influenced by a foreign object which has overpowered it. When we take our eyes off Christ, we can easily become disoriented and distracted because sin has a strong pull on us. Sin functions just like a magnet. The moment we focus on our circumstances and take our eyes off Christ is the moment when sin begins to obscure our view of **grace** and truth. As a result, it will always pull us in a direction in which we think selfishly and no longer practice giving generously as the Lord has taught us!

How can focusing on our circumstances distract our giving?

Question
2

Despite their **great trial of affliction** and **deep poverty**, the Macedonians still abounded in **joy** and gave generously or liberally (v. 2). Although they faced many problems in their day-to-day lives, they still generously gave their offerings to the Lord! For instance, believers in these cities encountered persecution at every turn. While Paul was still in Philippi, he was beaten and imprisoned for causing turmoil in the city—namely from casting out a demon from a slave girl who enriched her masters by telling the future ([Acts 16:16-24](#)). In Thessalonica the Jews became so incensed by the acceptance of the gospel that they assaulted believers, like Jason who hosted Paul, in order to get them to reveal the apostle's whereabouts ([Acts 17:5-9](#)). These same Jews even followed Paul some thirty miles to Berea to cause trouble for him there ([Acts 17:10-15](#))! Because we live in a fallen world, we will struggle and suffer at times even when we do what is right like the Macedonians. Regardless of what may happen to us

whether because of persecution or unexpected problems, we must maintain the right perspective and respond by remaining faithful to the Lord.

When we focus on our trials and tribulations, however, we generally want people to notice and take pity upon us. We become the center of attention and make everything about us rather than about the Lord! For example, a child who suffers a little scrape

that hasn't even drawn blood begins to wail as if he has been mortally wounded. He wants to be picked up, cuddled, and hugged—most likely by his mother. The crying stems from selfishness because he wants something that pleases him—attention and affection. Once he selfishly gets what he craves, he will stop crying as if the “pain” had totally



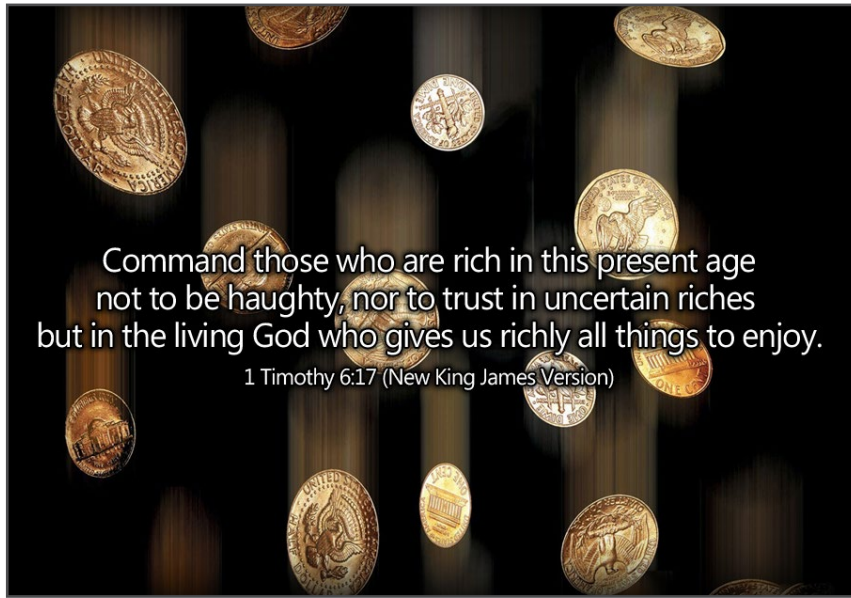
dissipated. This analogy doesn't mean that we shouldn't offer comfort to others during difficult times, but it does mean that we should have the right perspective when it comes to our own hardships. Rather than seeking attention for ourselves, we should emulate Christ and point others to Him. As a result, even during our own times of difficulty, we should seek ways to serve and give unto others as the Lord directs instead of selfishly focusing on our problems.

The **churches of Macedonia** did not have much wealth according to the world's standards—especially when compared to those in Corinth which was a wealthy metropolitan city. Although a great divide existed in Corinth between the wealthy and poor as well, they generally had a much higher standard of living and more wealth than did those in Macedonia. Consequently, Paul describes their **poverty** as **deep**, but notes that they graciously focused on giving and serving others in contrast to their own needs! Paul even bears **witness** that they gave **beyond their ability** (v. 3). They gave willingly and generously from that with which God had blessed them. They didn't primarily focus on their own needs—even though they had plenty to be met. They focused on serving and giving.

God is the one who empowered the Macedonians to give generously **beyond their ability**. In the same way, He will empower us to give generously if we would only trust Him and follow His guidance explicitly. If we think and act in terms of what we can do

Instruct

solely on our own, we will accomplish significantly less than if we rely upon the Lord



and trust in His plan. This doesn't mean that we should act recklessly and rashly, but that we should seek the Lord and follow Him wherever He leads. Failing to give our tithes and offerings to the Lord because we perceive we lack the means or because we encounter difficulties indicates a lack of trust in Him to fulfill His promises and to meet our needs! We demonstrate our trust

in the Lord, however, when we follow Him—even if that means giving **beyond** what we perceive as our **ability**!

How have you trusted God to give generously as He directed? How did things turn out?

Question
3

Although we should prioritize the needs of others as an act of service to the Lord commanded by Scripture, we must issue one caveat: we should not neglect our own basic needs or jeopardize our own well-being. This would be counterproductive. We must trust God to meet our basic needs so that we can be in a position to help others. Over the years, I've reminded many people who were caring for a sick or terminally-ill loved one that they must also care for their own physical needs. If we become fatigued by the lack of sleep, famished from the lack of proper meals, or fragile in our own health, how can we care for others? It's not selfish to care for ourselves when we have the right perspective of doing so for the benefit of others. If we neglect ourselves, how can we be in a place to serve and give?

How has God put you in a position to help others? How did you obediently follow His directives to do so?

Question
4

Not only did they give out of their **poverty**, but they also begged to give! They begged Paul to participate in this offering! Thus, he reports that they implored him **with**

much urgency to receive their gift and the fellowship of ministering to the saints (v. 4). People who focus on Christ rather than on themselves are naturally inclined to participate in ministry and give toward the work of the Lord. **Fellowship**, in this sense, signifies participation! They wanted to join together to strengthen the church in Jerusalem so that they could continue the work of ministry in glorifying the Lord and disseminating the gospel. Participating in ministry and giving faithfully to the work of the Lord should bring us great **joy!**

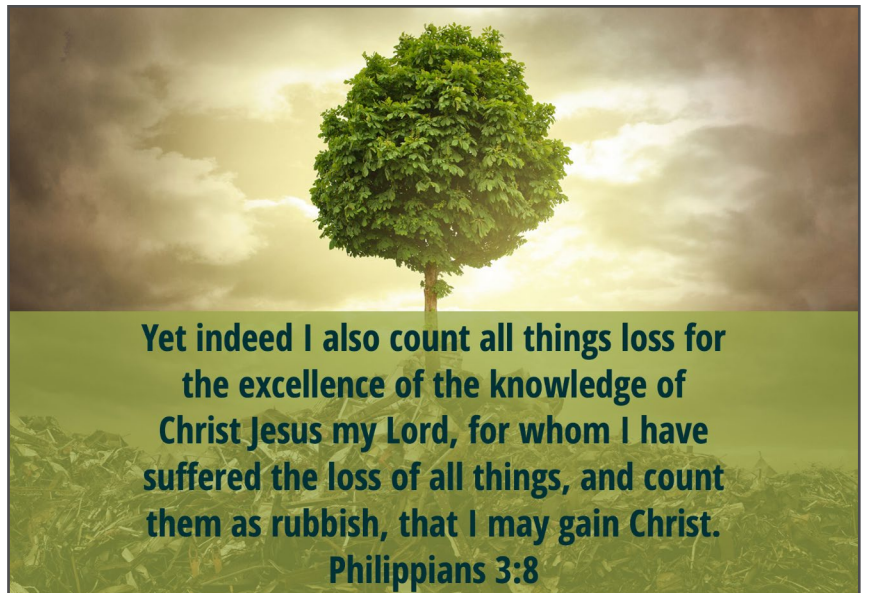
2 Corinthians 8:5-9

GIVE SACRIFICIALLY:

Because of God's **grace** so prevalent in their lives, the Macedonians had given generously even in their **affliction**. They also gave sacrificially because they completely surrendered themselves to the Lord as their **first** act of worship. God's **grace**, therefore, compels us to give not only of our resources and possessions, but to give ourselves wholly unto Him. Serving and giving weren't something they did just on Sundays. They defined their life in Christ! These actions became part of who they were and how they lived in Him. For this reason, Paul reports that the Macedonians **first gave themselves to the Lord and then to him by the will of God** (v. 5).

To give ourselves **to the Lord** requires a relationship with Christ. When we have a relationship with Him, then we will dedicate ourselves to following Him in complete obedience. In other words, we will fully surrender every area of our lives to Him. We won't be part-time believers who work until our shift is finished and then clock out to do things on our own! Thus, we won't give some areas of our lives to Him while we retain control over others; we will surrender everything just like the Macedonians did. They submitted to His authority and His leadership in every area as signified in that they **first gave** their very own lives to Him.

Consider how a marriage would work in which one spouse dedicated him or herself only part of the time to the relationship. It wouldn't! Who would ever desire a marriage



Instruct

in which a husband or wife would callously say, “I’m your spouse only part of the time; I married you, but I am only committing to be faithful to you in these areas?” No one would knowingly seek or enter such a relationship! But why do we act this way with the Lord who uses the metaphor of a husband throughout Scripture to describe our relationship with Him? Sometimes we only give part of ourselves to Him. Although we may not ponder it often, we tend to compartmentalize those areas of our lives which we dedicate ourselves to the Lord and those in which we wish to retain control. But the Lord wants us all; He wants us to surrender to Him completely in every area, including our service and giving.

Have you first given your life to the Lord? How does this tangibly look in your life? How is this reflected in your finances?

Question
5

In verse 7, Paul lists some of the areas in which the Corinthians have already fully surrendered to the Lord. As they have **abounded** or excelled in submitting themselves to the Lord **in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence**, and **in love** for him, so also should they fully surrender in their gracious giving toward the special offering that they had already begun. Such devotion will require great sacrifice whereby we commit every area of our lives into His hands so that He may mold and shape us in the way He wants. This further requires that we die to ourselves! We must die to our selfish desires and our old way of thinking ([Luke 9:23](#)), thereby adopting His perspective which should become evident in the new way in which we live ([Gal 2:20](#)). Therefore, we should



willingly submit ourselves into the full control of the Lord—including what we perceive as our finances and possessions ([2 Cor 9:7](#)).

Paul contends that he speaks **not by commandment, but he is testing the sincerity of their love by the diligence of others** (v. 8).

Paul isn’t coercing them to give. On the contrary, their giving and dedication to finish the offering

they started prove the genuineness of their **love** for others. It shows that they're not all talk and no action so to speak. Although Scripture does command us to give a tithe of our gross income, here it refers to a free-will offering given in **love** to meet a specific need in the community. Therefore, this is an offering in addition to their tithes. Whether giving our regular tithes or a special offering to meet a specific need, we must do so willingly with sincere **love**—first for God and then for others. Jesus Himself serves as the best example that captures such sincere **love** through His willingness to give sacrificially as the Father had asked! For this reason, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they **know** (i.e., they have experienced) **the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ** who being **rich became poor for their sakes that through His poverty they might become rich** (v. 9).

How do your offerings indicate your sincerity of love?

Question
6

With this statement, Paul beautifully summarizes the gospel. Jesus left the splendor of heaven to become fully man while never divesting Himself of His divinity. Born into a common, working-class family, He experienced all the elements of life we face daily. The King of glory humbled Himself and became a servant to the creation He had made! As a perfect sacrifice, therefore, He has given us an inheritance that surpasses any earthly riches—an incorruptible, permanent inheritance that promises eternal life with the Father. Thus, Jesus demonstrates the quintessential attitude that we ought to have when we give. He gave of Himself *obediently* even to the point of death on the cross ([Phil 2:8](#)). He gave of Himself *willingly* whereby He laid down His life which He acknowledged that no one could take from Him by force ([John 10:18](#)). He also gave of Himself *completely* and *sacrificially* as the Father directed, seeking to do His will rather than fulfill His own desires ([Luke 22:42](#)). In this same way, we ought to give of ourselves, our finances, our possessions, our talents, and our time to the Lord as He directs according to His divine will.

How does your attitude compare to Jesus' attitude when you give?

Question
7

2 Corinthians 8:10-12

GIVE WILLINGLY:

Having established the nature of this offering as free-will which was given to meet

a specific need in the community that had arisen, Paul offers **advice** rather than a command; he gives this **advice to their advantage** (v. 10). In doing so, he emphasizes that no one had forced them to give toward the offering; they had given out of their own desire because they had seen a need and had been moved by compassion to respond as the Lord directed. Now, Paul exhorts them to finish what they have started (v. 11). Whereas **there was a readiness to desire** to participate in the offering on their part, they should have this same **desire** to see a **completion** of it **out of what they have**. In other words, they should not let the momentum fizzle, but should complete the task which they had started.

In ministry, keeping the momentum going sometimes becomes a difficult task because the passion with which we so eagerly begin quickly fades and we tend to lose excitement. At times, we become consumed with the ordinary routines of life that we forget about the goals we have set. We don't keep the goal at the forefront of our



minds, so it simply fades as time goes forward. The Corinthians weren't dishonest or malicious in their intent; they simply had not kept the offering in mind. They lost momentum and did not finish what they had started. This happens all too frequently in our world today. We begin something with excitement and energy, but that excitement fades

and we fail to finish the task—whether coming back from a mission trip with the desire to evangelize, returning from camp with a desire to grow closer to the Lord, or committing to serve in a particular area in the church.

In 2018, we began a capital stewardship campaign to repair and update the sanctuary which we called *It's Time* which concluded this October. As we began the campaign, we each prayerfully considered how much that God wanted us to give above our regular tithes, making solemn pledges between ourselves and the Lord. Although the church tabulated the amount of the pledges as a means of determining the amount of funds we would ultimately receive, we did not coerce anyone to participate according to the

amount pledged. This was a matter of conscience between you and the Lord. As the campaign itself has ended, let us consider whether we finished what we started and gave what we committed unto the Lord as He laid on our hearts three years ago. Some have probably given much more than originally committed as the Lord has blessed them whereas others may have put it out of mind and failed to finish strong as they had started. Let us finish what we've started as God has led us as a church just like Paul encourages the Corinthians here in this letter.

In what areas of life have you begun strong with momentum, but then you've faded down the stretch and failed to finish what you've started?

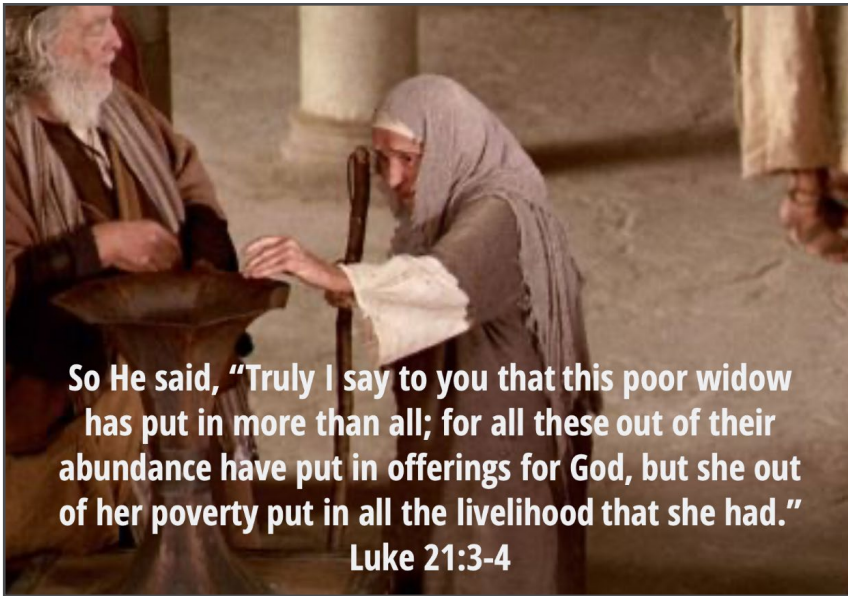
Question
8

We must be ready and willing to give. However, many people limit what they give to the Lord because they have the wrong perspective. For this reason, Paul explains that **if there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have** (v. 12). Simply put, we cannot give what we don't have. Quite the opposite, we give from that with which God has blessed us! People too often look at what they don't have and lament, "I can't." Rather, we should look at what we have and say, "I can as the Lord wills." Therefore, it all boils down to what we make the chief priority in our lives.

Let's examine some common excuses that we frequently encounter. Some argue, "I don't have the time." We all have the same amount of time; it's a matter of how we choose to spend it! We make time for the things we enjoy or we find important. Others may decry, "I don't have the knowledge or education." We all have access to the same knowledge in Scripture; God even promises wisdom to those who earnestly seek it. Yet, some make this statement about lacking knowledge because they haven't made studying the Word priority and they haven't put forth the effort to seek the wisdom God has generously given.

Finally, some will espouse, "I don't have the finances or resources to give." Rather than look at what we don't have or set an amount that we should have before we can give, let us truly look at what the Lord has given to us. At times, God may lead us to give as a tremendous sacrifice like the widow in Elijah's time who gave him the last of her flour ([1 Kings 17:7-16](#)), the widow in Jesus' day who gave all she had into the temple treasury ([Luke 21:1-4](#)), and the Macedonians who gave out of their **poverty** here. Each of these gave from what they had—and in at least two cases they gave all they had.

Instruct



As we close our study this week, may we take inventory of what we have, so that we may truly realize how abundantly the Lord has blessed us. After taking this comprehensive inventory, let us prayerfully consider how the Lord wants us to function as stewards or caretakers of the things He has given us. Whether we are starting out working for minimum

wage or we have the security of a good job with good benefits which allow us to live comfortably, God has blessed us with something we can give—something which we can contribute. Let us follow the Lord's plan for giving according to the means with which He has given us. May we give generously and willingly as He leads from the things we have, remembering how much His Son has given for us!

When giving, do you look at the things you don't have or those which you do? How does your perspective influence how you give?

Question
9

Inspire

We met the fictitious character Joseph T. Penney in the introduction. Although fictitious, his perspective may resemble our own. When faced with a lack of finances to buy the necessary items for his family, he focused on what he did not have rather than what he did. We all have different needs and we each have different amounts of income—whether through salary, social security or retirement funds, investments or savings, or other business ventures. Nevertheless, God expects us to maintain the same philosophy for giving. We are to give from what we have. Sometimes that giving may require more sacrifice than others. But God desires that we trust Him and seek Him when we give. When we do, we will find contentment and joy in our giving, knowing that we have obediently fulfilled God's will.

Incorporate

How do you make giving a priority in your life despite some of the obstacles and challenges you may face?

How is the leadership of the Lord evident in your financial decisions as well as the way that you view your possessions?

How do you contribute from the things with which the Lord has blessed you?

January 23, 2022



*Following God's Plan for Giving:
The Misappropriation
Malachi 3:1-12*

Focal Verse:

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings."

Malachi 3:8

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Introduce

While driving to the office one morning, I heard pundits on a local radio station discussing how Elon Musk, who has become the richest man in the world, made \$51,000 every two minutes. To corroborate their assertion, I found an article in the *Daily Star*, a newspaper based in the UK, which reported that Musk made an average of \$21,030 every five minutes at the time of the article's publication back in February! This means that he earns more than the average salary of most people in the US within just thirty minutes.* With this revelation, the local radio hosts then began pondering what they would do if they had such unfathomable wealth. During this discussion, one of them referenced a segment on *The Tonight Show* which also sought such an answer from ordinary citizens who responded through Twitter.

In a segment host Jimmy Fallon calls "hashtag," he asked fans to respond to the phrase "#IfIHadATrillionDollars" in reference to the recently passed "infrastructure" bill by the House of Representatives. The

following excerpts represent proposals submitted by his viewers.** One respondent quipped, "I would have Jeff Bezos personally deliver my Amazon purchase." Another glibly asserts, "I would buy a rodeo. Then I'd buy another one just so I could say, 'This isn't my first rodeo.'" Yet, another well-intentioned viewer



interjects, "I'd buy every house on a cul-de-sac for my whole family and then move to Hawaii." One not so innocently surmises, "I would hire Morgan Freeman to follow me around and narrate my life."

In contrast to these responses, one person sounds gracious and generous when he proposes, "I'd buy the world's supply of guac and set up stands outside every Chipotle giving it away for free." On the onset, this statement looks like a selfless act performed out of the goodness of an individual who wants to give back to the community. Without understanding the true motives for such an action, however, we cannot identify it as completely selfless. The one who typed it could have been motivated by spite in an attempt to take on corporate greed by inflicting minimal damage by

Introduce

undercutting some of Chipotle's profits! Yet, almost every other response if we exclude the ambiguity of this one, has misguided motives which selfishly seek to benefit the person. To have Bezos deliver a package, for example, champions pride and arrogance whereby this viewer wishes to parade his wealth by antagonizing his "rival."

Whether they intentionally designed these responses to be funny and get a laugh or they would actually act upon them if they had such wealth, they nonetheless expose the heart of mankind when it comes to money. In general, man has a selfish outlook apart from the Lord when it comes to finances. Having wealth, however, is not wrong or evil in itself, but it can lead to all kinds of evil when we have the wrong perspective and we let the love of it dominate our lives. It then skews our perspective and distorts our motives! Consequently, the love of money can compel us to act selfishly, robbing the Lord of what is rightfully His—just as they did in Malachi's day. Therefore, let us follow God's plan for giving, so that we appropriate the resources which He has so graciously and abundantly given us in the right way.

Key
Question

What do you do with the money God has given you?

In Reference



*Josh O'Brien, "Staggering Amount of Money Elon Musk Makes Every Five Minutes," *Daily Star* (February 3, 2021), available from www.dailystar.co.uk.

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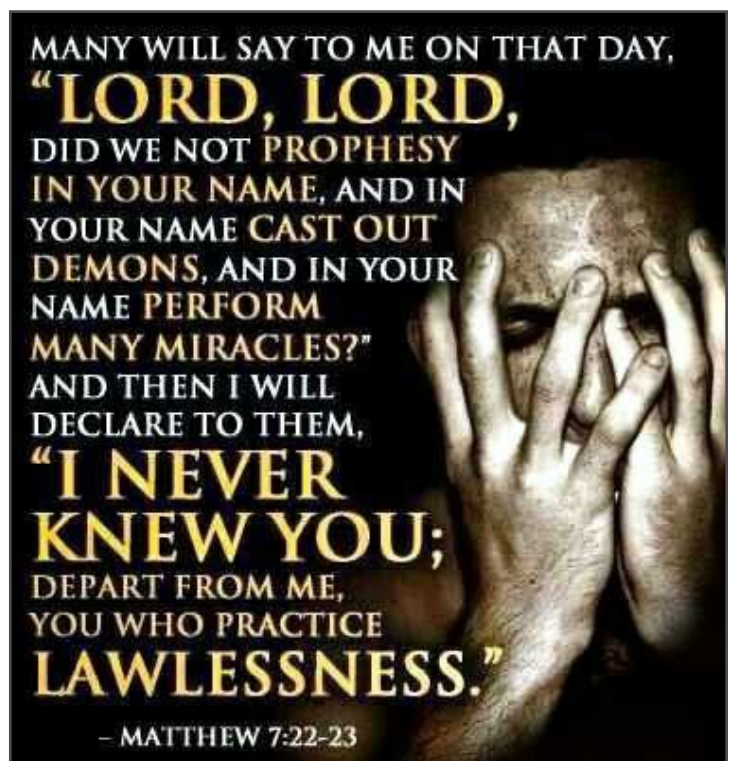
Malachi 3:1-6

THE CLEANSING BY THE MESSENGER:

Scripture clearly denotes that God owns everything in the universe ([Psalm 24:1](#); [50:10](#); [Haggai 2:8](#)) and He has enlisted mankind to care for it on His behalf ([Psalm 115:16](#)). Although God already owns everything and technically does not need “our” money, He does graciously include us in His plan by commanding us to give in support of the work to which He has called the local church. Therefore, He instructs us to bring **all our tithes into the storehouse**—the local church ([Mal 3:10](#)). The Lord then uses these **tithes** to fund ministries with the necessary resources to reach the community with the gospel while at the same time providing support to full-time vocational ministers whom He has called to oversee and equip His church ([Num 18:30](#); [1 Cor 9:3-12](#); [1 Tim 5:17-18](#)). As such, the local church requires money, not to enrich itself, but to advance the gospel into all the world through missions, evangelism, and discipleship.

During the time of Malachi, however, the children of Israel had become corrupt. They participated in activities at the **temple** merely as a ritual; in other words, they only went through the motions in order to fulfill their “duties” legalistically in an attempt to placate the Lord. But God knew their hearts; He saw through their phony religious activities. Therefore, He promised to **send His Messenger to prepare the way before Him** (v. 1). Because of the gravity of their sinfulness, the Lord Himself would **come** in judgment. When He comes, the people will no longer be able to masquerade their motives or conceal the inner-most thoughts of their hearts behind their hypocrisy and fake religiosity. God’s **Messenger**, that is Christ, will expose them and He will show their deeds for what they truly are—worthless. One day, therefore,

He **will come suddenly to His temple** in judgment. **Even** though some may claim they **delight in the Messenger of the covenant**, the truth will be revealed. Some who



Instruct

seem outwardly religious and appear good never truly had a relationship with the Lord because they rejected His **Messenger**—the Messiah.

If Jesus were to return today, how would He evaluate your life? What would He find in your thoughts, motives, and actions?

Question
1

Although Malachi looks forward to the day of judgment when the Messiah would come, God does not wait until He sends His Son to confront the people for their failure to conduct themselves in holiness. He desires for them to live righteously now and to reflect that righteousness in genuine acts of worship, particularly in the giving of their **tithes** and **offerings** ([Mal 3:8](#)). To understand the current religious climate and their sin against the Lord, we must look at the broader picture of Israel's history. Judah, the Southern Kingdom of the divided nation of Israel, had been given numerous chances to repent of her idolatry and sinful practices odious to the Lord. Although He had sent numerous prophets to warn the wayward nation that He would not tolerate their sin and they had even witnessed the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel for this very same reason, they still consistently refused to repent.

Consequently, in 586 BC, God allowed the Babylonians to destroy the nation and carry the people into captivity (i.e., Daniel). Yet, after approximately seventy years, He would restore the land to the children of Israel and use the remnant released by Cyrus of Persia to begin rebuilding His temple. Cyrus even sent them with a generous gift to help



fund the repair of the city and the temple (i.e., Ezra and Nehemiah). The book of Malachi thus begins at this point where Israel had re-occupied the land and begun to rebuild the **temple**; however, the people still had not learned to rely upon God and to serve Him alone. As a result of their sinfulness, God found their sacrifices and **offerings** odious. But through this **refiner's**

fire, God would cleanse them so that their offering would once again **be pleasant**

to Him **as in** past **days** ([Mal 3:4](#)). Once again, however, the children of Israel stand in judgment for their failure to follow God's plan.

To describe this process of judgment, Malachi uses the imagery of **a refiner's fire** and **launderer's soap** which defines the purpose of the Lord's coming (v. 2). He will test every individual and remove every impurity—all godlessness and sin. Therefore, Malachi asks two questions: **Who can endure the day of His coming** and **who can stand when He appears?** The Hebrew anticipates the answer "no one." On our own, we cannot withstand the judgment of the Lord unless we have a relationship with Christ. If we reject Christ and fail to repent of our sins, then we will face God's wrath. To put Malachi's analogy in more modern terms, one day God will come to clean house by removing all the ungodly who claim to worship Him in purity but in actuality have rejected His Son—the **Messenger** ([Matt 21:33-46](#)).

Although Malachi urges them to repent and return to God, the people steadfastly refuse. So, God ultimately sends His **Messenger** to confront them in their hypocrisy which Malachi likens to **a refiner's fire**. **A refiner's fire** superheats metal ore which causes the dross, or impurities, to rise to the top which can then be removed so that only the pure metal remains. Through this image, Malachi, therefore, condemns the impure motives of the people in their worship. On the outside, they seem pure and honorable, but when the **Messenger** comes, He will expose their impurities; thus, many will be exposed as frauds. In the Gospels, we see Jesus beginning this very process when He drives the moneychangers from the temple who brought in corruption to God's house rather than reverence ([Matt 21:12-17](#)).

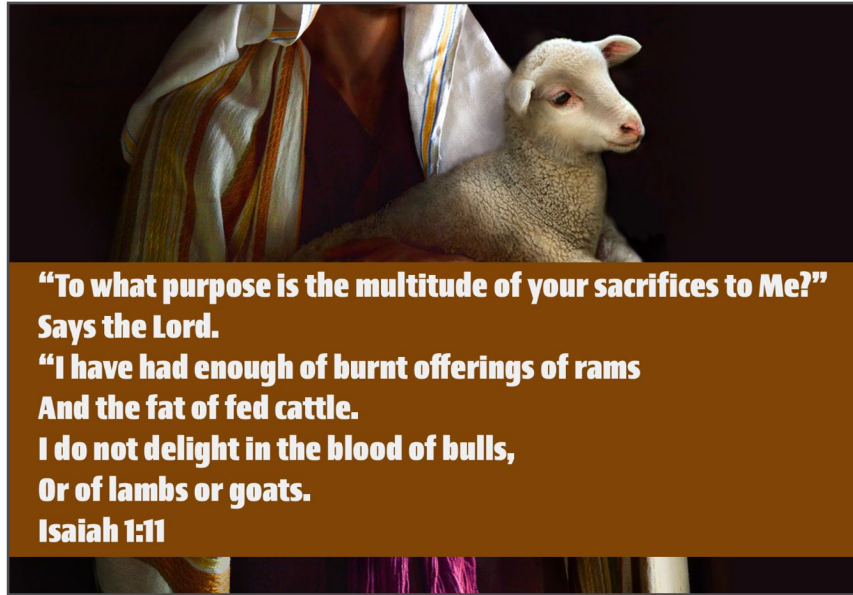
How consistent are you in your worship of the Lord? Do you follow His plan outlined in Scripture? Do you practice what you preach?

Question
2

Even though they came to the **temple** to worship and brought their sacrifices as prescribed by the Lord, they had sin in their lives; they lived in ways that dishonored the Lord. In fact, Malachi lists some of God's charges against them; they behaved as **sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers**, those who exploited the less fortunate, and those who abused foreigners who legally resided within their land (v. 5). Malachi identifies their greatest sin last: they **do not fear** the Lord! This is evident in that they have strayed from God's **ordinances** and **have not kept them** (v. 7). Mere ritualistic worship is meaningless to the Lord ([Isa 1:11-15](#)). He finds no pleasure in worship out of an impure heart ruled by sinful desires rather than cleansed by His blood. If we give our

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tithes and **offerings** while we continue to sin, it does not bring honor and glory to the Lord; it doesn't placate Him or curry favor with Him as if we have performed some



**“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?”
Says the Lord.
“I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle.
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
Or of lambs or goats.
Isaiah 1:11**

charitable deed. On the contrary, it angers Him because we still live in disobedience by participating in our fleshly desires.

Despite His imminent judgment against Israel's sin, God remains patient. He does **not** immediately **consume** them in His wrath.

Instead, He calls them to **return** to Him—that is to repent of their sins. For this reason, Malachi also affirms

that God does **not change** (v. 6). God will judge them if they continue unabated in their sin, but He also gives them a chance to repent! He has clearly provided a plan for us to follow in His Word in which He also outlines the consequences for failing to abide by it. He doesn't deviate at all from that plan; He always remains faithful to His Word, so we can know exactly what He expects and what we ought to expect if we deviate from it.

Malachi 3:7-9

THE CURSE FOR DISOBEDIENCE:

Because of Israel's disregard for His law and as a result of forsaking their relationship with Him, they gave God their leftovers merely as a token gesture to gain favor with Him. But inwardly they did not have pure motives for giving. Verses 8 and 9 plainly state that we **rob** God when we **refuse** to return the **tithes and offerings** due unto Him. To emphasize this, the prophet begins by asking a series of rhetorical questions. First, he poses, **“Will a man rob God?”** After their release from captivity in Babylon, the people had become prosperous and once again they had abandoned God for the love of money and the power with which it comes. Therefore, this first question would have seemed incredulous to the people of that day just as it would our own. If one were to ask a professing Christian if he would **“rob God,”** one would almost universally expect a negative answer: **“No, I do not rob God in any way!”**

So, Malachi follows with a second question: “**In what way have we robbed You?**” He then answers for them. They **rob** the Lord through their pitiful **tithes** and **offerings**. Technically, the people were bringing their **offerings** to the Lord, but they did not have the right spirit nor did they give the prescribed, unblemished offering! Instead, they gave unacceptable sacrifices prohibited by the law. The people were bringing what they had left over from their harvests as well as defective animals as their **offerings**. Rather than bringing their best, the people brought the maimed, blind, and sick of their flocks as their tithe! They gave the Lord an offering unfit for even another human being!

What is your reason for giving? Do you give the Lord your best or simply what you have left over?

Question
3

Recently, my home state of Kentucky suffered devastation from tornadoes in which a large, single tornado obliterated everything in its path for 128 miles, including part of the county in which I grew up and only a few miles from where my family still lives. Many people have responded generously to this tragedy—donating money, providing food and water, and offering physical labor to help in recovery. Yet, many people also sent their junk—the things they no longer wanted, didn’t need, or couldn’t use. Worn-out clothing and old items of which these people wanted to rid themselves inundated and exasperated donation centers. The tremendous amount of such gifts caused one such official to lament something similar to, “Don’t send us your junk.”



Yet, some people, just as in Malachi’s day, have this same attitude with the Lord. They bring Him their junk and what they have left over! Most of us are probably appalled at the idea someone would bring a pile of junk to someone who lost everything. If someone had done that to us, we would be upset and most likely make a comment similar to that of this Kentucky official. But why do we do this to God if we wouldn’t accept such **offerings** or gifts ourselves? God demands our best and should receive

Instruct

our best. We shouldn't make our **tithes** and **offerings** an afterthought; they should be a priority. We should give in the right spirit, for the right reason, and with the right motivation. We should set aside our best for the Lord as His holiness requires, giving a tithe of our gross income ([Exod 34:26](#); [Prov 3:9](#); [Ezek 44:30](#)) and generous offerings for specific purposes as He puts in our hearts ([2 Cor 8-9](#)).

How does your giving reflect the priority you give to God?

Question
4

Because of their disdain for the Lord's commands and their disrespect for His holiness, the entire **nation** stands **cursed** by their actions (v. 9). Malachi reinforces the notion that they have brought this **curse** upon themselves because they have **robbed** the Lord of His **tithes** and **offerings**! Scripture often notes that such curses can span successive generations because families fail to teach their children the importance of obeying and serving the Lord. For instance, [Exodus 34:7](#) describes God as merciful and forgiving, but that He also acts justly "by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

To avoid such a curse on our own generation, we must do two things. First, we must humbly obey the Lord ourselves, following the plan which He has prescribed for us. Our children and our families should visually see us practicing the principles God has commanded us. Therefore, we must be an example, living a good testimony before them. Second, we should teach our children and our families to be good stewards. We should teach them biblical principles about living within their means, managing their finances by exercising self-control in their spending, making wise investments, developing a financial plan, and setting aside their best in **tithes** and **offerings** to the Lord.

How do you model biblical giving for your family?
How do you teach your children the importance of giving tithes and offerings to the Lord?

Question
5

As this third chapter of Malachi shows, the lack of tithing is actually symptomatic of a much larger problem than just misappropriating the monies with which God has entrusted us. Certainly, failing to give as the Lord has commanded constitutes

disobedience. But it can also be indicative of sin in other areas of our lives as well. We've already seen the charges God has levied against the people in verse 5. Therefore, the call to examine our giving should also be a call to examine our faithfulness to the Lord in other areas of our lives too. We must ask ourselves then, "Do we go through the motions when we attend church, pray, read Scripture, serve, and give or do we worship the Lord in sincerity with a pure heart with the right motives?"

When we have an ailment, such as a cold or the flu, we typically have a number of symptoms that indicate we're sick. The symptoms, however, may vary from person to person, but they still all indicate one thing: we're ill. Sin is a sickness so to speak that can only be cured through the blood of Christ and complete surrender to Him in repentance. The "symptoms" of sin may vary greatly from person to person, but they all indicate one thing: disobedience to the Lord leading to



death. One symptom of sin on which Malachi focuses here is that of giving—giving our **tithes** and **offerings** to the Lord. What we give and the spirit in which we give it is indicative of one's overarching attitude toward the Lord. Do we give Him our best? Do we give Him ourselves completely which then becomes evident in the righteous way we live, the way we serve, and the love we show to others?

Malachi 3:10-12

THE CALL TO GIVE TITHES:

God wants us to have a healthy relationship with Him, so He has outlined all the principles by which we should live to have a successful and abundant life according to His standards. And He makes us a magnanimous promise if we abide by His boundaries! If we honor Him by giving our **tithes** and **offerings** with a sincere and generous heart while we live righteously, then He will surely bless us. First, God instructs the children of Israel to bring **all** their **tithes into** God's **storehouse** and test Him to see if He will not indeed bless them (v. 10). At first glance, this may seem to contradict Scripture which elsewhere prohibits the testing of the Lord ([Deut 6:16](#)). In those instances, humans act pridefully and stubbornly by testing the Lord through their disobedience, namely by serving other gods and following the practices of the secular

society around them. Thus, they test God's patience and His resolve to punish justly. Here, on the contrary, God Himself invites the people to test Him. The test, in this case, means that God will offer proof of His faithfulness to His Word. People can experience it for themselves. Therefore, He is eager to prove His faithfulness to the people if only they would demonstrate their trust in Him by faithfully giving as He has commanded. We must issue two words of caution. God is not offering a money-back guarantee so to speak if we're not satisfied with the results of our giving. Such a view perpetuates the wrong perspective! It signifies the selfishness about which we learned in the introduction. If we have a relationship with Christ, God's desires should have become our desires because we should have adopted His way of thinking. And if the blessings we receive don't match our own expectations or the world's standards of what a blessing should look like, then it won't matter!

How has God proved His faithfulness to you when you have given as He has specified?

Question
6

In addition, we must also maintain the right perspective when it comes to giving and receiving a blessing. The blessing comes as a result of our obedience to the Lord. Consequently, we shouldn't give to be blessed; that's the wrong motive—and the reason Israel gave defective offerings in this very chapter. On the contrary, we give because we love the Lord and we want to honor Him in all we do. As a result of our sincerity in serving Him, the Lord will indeed bless us! Yet, many misunderstand this principle, emphasizing the blessing we will receive from God in terms of our own personal desires and gratification; in other words, we will get whatever we want if only we give in faith. The Bible, however, never promises we will get whatever we want. It does promise that God will grant us whatever we need according to His will when we act in faithful obedience.

Certainly, we see this principle reflected here when God promises to **open the windows of heaven and pour out for them such blessing**. God isn't promising to give them whatever they ask. He isn't promising to make them wealthy and prosperous either. Rather, He promises to give them what they need. Literally, He promises them to send rain so that their crops may thrive and they might produce a bountiful harvest, so that they may have what they need to live physically. Moreover, God also promises to **rebuke the devourer for their sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of their**

ground (v. 11). To that, God adds that the **vine shall not fail to bear fruit for them in the field**. The **devourer** here is not Satan or his dominion of demons. It refers to the harvest being destroyed by insects or rotting on the **vine**. Nothing pains a farmer more than going to the **vine** and seeing a luscious, beautiful piece of **fruit** having matured and ripened in the sun only to pluck it to find that its bottom has spoiled! But here God promises that He will protect their harvest from these types of misfortune.

When we studied [Matthew 6:19-34](#) during the second week of this month, we learned that God would supply our needs if only we would trust Him and seek Him first.

Although most of us are not farmers and, at the most amateur gardeners, we can still glean a second principle from here in Malachi 3 as well. If we are faithful to God and we have obediently followed His plan, many times God will also protect what we have and make the possessions which He has entrusted us last longer so that we don't need to spend money repairing or replacing things annually. Israel had experienced this mercy of the Lord while wandering in the wilderness whereby for forty years their shoes did not wear out ([Deut 29:5](#)). And God will also bless us similarly according to His will.

How has God blessed you by allowing your possessions to last or meet your needs longer than you may expect?

Question
7

Finally, God promises the Israelites that **all the nations will call them blessed** because they **will live in a delightful land** with plentiful natural resources (v. 12). When we give faithfully and live obediently as the Lord has commanded, we will experience palpable contentment and joy that those around us will see. Therefore, the purpose of the blessings which God bestows upon us is that others may know Him. Others may see how He has fulfilled His promises through us and confidently know that He would do the same for them if only they would repent and surrender to Him. God also specifies this same purpose in His covenant with Abraham; there God noted that all the **nations** would be blessed through Abraham's faithfulness ([Gen 18:18; 22:18](#)). Ultimately, that promise was fulfilled through Christ who blessed all the **nations** by freely giving anyone who would receive it eternal life through His sacrificial death. Therefore, it remains of utmost importance that we testify to God's blessings so that all **nations** may know that He alone is the One who gives the blessings and only in Him can we find salvation and life through His promises.

As we examine our lives this week, let us ask the question: How do I view the resources and finances God has given me? The way we view them often determines how we use them. If we follow the pattern of the world, we will regard them as ours to do with as we please. Consequently, we will tend to act selfishly, using our money on things we desire while we omit God altogether or simply give Him what we have left over. At times, we may give out of habit, which is not necessarily bad. But when that habit is not accompanied with genuine worship from a pure heart which we live in obedience, it does not please the Lord. Rather than go through the motions when we give, let us examine our hearts and motives. May we follow God's plan for giving, whereby we give out of obedience because we love the Lord which in turn we show through the righteous way we live in every area of our lives.

Incorporate

What motivates you to give? How faithfully do you give your tithes and offerings to the Lord through His church for the purpose of spreading the gospel?

How does your giving serve as a barometer (or indicator) for the faithfulness in other areas of your life: serving, praying, reading Scripture, and living righteously?

What testimony can you share with others about God's faithfulness and blessing when you have given as He commanded? How can you also use this testimony to share the gospel with others?

January 30, 2022



*Following God's Plan for Giving:
The Ministry
1 Corinthians 3:4-15*

Focal Verse:

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

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1 Corinthians 3:11

Introduce

Several years ago, I watched a documentary on the development of the subway system in New York City and some of the challenges engineers faced in boring new tunnels to add platforms hundreds of feet below Grand Central Station—a project which has spanned fifteen years and cost billions of dollars. In places, the Manhattan soil consists of elements that has made it almost the consistency of what we would liken popularly to quicksand. No sooner than the machine had bored a few feet, the soil would shift filling the freshly dug tunnel with sediment. As a result, it necessitated the adoption of new techniques for securing it. Unlike some traditional tunnels, workers had to bore and build at the same time, laying both the rebar and concrete as they slowly dug to keep the tunnel from completely collapsing.

But this revelation about the unsuitable nature of the soil for building tunnels also led me to ponder how an eclectic collection of skyscrapers could be built on such unstable soil on a tiny island situated along the Hudson River. How do these massive steel towers and glittering, gleaming, and glass-covered buildings of New York stand without wavering and faltering in the natural elements that bombard them daily? Upon

closer inspection, we will notice that the city's skyscrapers are concentrated in very specific areas. For example, the area between Midtown Manhattan, in which we find the iconic Empire State Building, and the southern tip of the island known as Downtown, which contains the financial district and the new World Trade Center, conspicuously has very few



skyscrapers. Ultimately, the lack of high rises in this area boils down to the inability to build upon a good foundation which will not waver!

To build a skyscraper on the island of Manhattan, engineers must drill pylons through this shifting soil into the bedrock many feet below the surface. On that bedrock, which is called Manhattan schist, they anchor these mammoth buildings. Where the schist is hundreds of feet below the surface—the area between Midtown and Downtown—it is not feasible to construct modern high rises because the soil would shift, causing them

Introduce

to collapse because they're not anchored into something firm! In the first century, Jesus even warned about the peril of building on such soil (sand) and admonished his audience to build upon rock ([Matt 7:24-27](#)).

Stewardship requires building upon the right foundation—Christ—for the purpose of introducing people into a relationship with Him and promoting the spiritual growth of His church ([1 Cor 3:10](#)). If we build upon any other foundation than Christ, it will fail. We can have the best programs, the greatest entertainment, the most innovative technology, and the best things money can buy. But if these things are not founded upon the Rock, that is Christ, they will ultimately prove worthless when tested. This isn't to suggest that we don't need great programs or the latest technologies; nor does it mean that we shouldn't spend money. Rather, it cautions us to evaluate how we build. Do we build the ministry to which God has called us upon the only true foundation of Christ or do we build it upon the impermanent things of this world? As a good steward, therefore, we must assess whether we are using the resources which God has given us to build wisely upon the foundation of Christ.

Key
Question

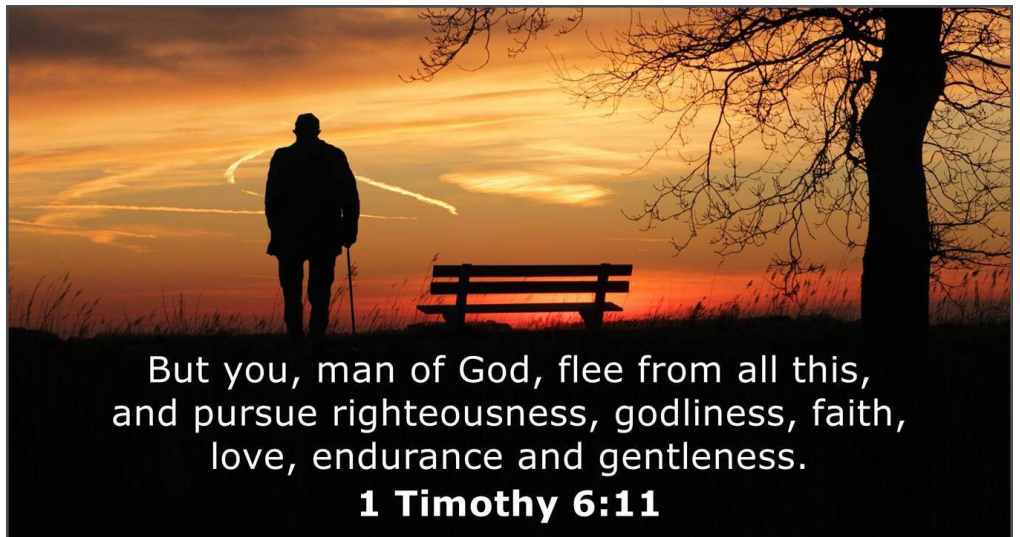
How would you evaluate the foundation upon which you build your life and the ministry? How firmly is it anchored upon Christ?

1 Corinthians 3:4-7

THE PRIORITY OF GOD:

The primary concern of stewardship is the proper growth of the Kingdom of God in which we participate by building correctly and purposefully upon the foundation of Jesus Christ which has already been laid. Proper growth of the Kingdom is manifest through 1) spiritual growth of the individual members to become more Christ-like (i.e., discipleship) and 2) the numerical growth of the church in which people have been transformed through their relationship with Christ (i.e., evangelism and missions). We see both of these purposes illustrated here in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. First, we observe the need for spiritual growth among the members who harbor a **carnal** mindset (v. 4). Division existed among individuals in the church who had aligned themselves with particular personalities of the preachers with whom they most associated rather than regarding themselves as united in Christ for the specific purpose of glorifying Him. This leads Paul to ask are they not **carnal** who say, “**I am of Paul and another I am of Apollos?**”

To understand Paul’s assertion about this fleshly mindset of the Corinthians, we must examine the context of the letter as a whole to ascertain the misconceptions that the church faced and how they played a crucial role in dictating both their thoughts and actions. The church was dysfunctional because they had forgotten the primary concern of stewardship of the gospel, focusing inwardly upon themselves instead of seeing the larger picture of Kingdom growth. They arrogantly perceived that they had matured and become perfect in every way; therefore, they wrongly



But you, man of God, flee from all this,
and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith,
love, endurance and gentleness.

1 Timothy 6:11

surmised that their attitudes and actions no longer mattered even to the point of sinning with impunity and celebrating it ([1 Cor 5:2](#))! As a result, they had a bad reputation among the secular community because of the immorality and bickering

present within their congregation. They were no different than the ungodly around

How do you ensure that you maintain integrity and a good testimony before the world?

Question
1

First, the church in Corinth had division among its members. They followed the personalities of their leaders that appealed to them (see [1 Cor 1:11-13](#)) rather than seeking Christ and His righteousness. In doing so, they elevated their personal preferences above the gospel which promotes unity in glorifying the Lord together as a body. Consequently, God became overshadowed by their selfish desires and eclipsed by the personalities of their leadership. This leads us to [1 Corinthians 3:4-5](#) where Paul discusses such a rivalry in which the people had pit him against Apollos. Paul, however, wants the Corinthians to maintain the proper focus. He wants them to focus on God and not other human beings. Therefore, he later interjects, **“So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase”** (1 Cor 3:7). Others should see Christ in us. As a result, we ought to practice what John the Baptist says of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Today, with the consumerist and entertainment mindset of Western culture, church attendance and growth are often based upon programs which appeal to people’s emotions and their sense of what they personally find valuable—not necessarily godly practices as defined by Scripture. In addition, we also base them upon the personality of the pastor who attracts people with psychological and entertaining messages which sometimes have little substance with respect to the truth of the gospel. Frequently, such pastors will tell people what they want to hear instead of preaching the undiluted truth. However, this does not mean that we ought not have the best programs and best preaching possible, but it does mean that we ought to evaluate everything that we do and say on the sole basis of the content of the gospel—not the charisma of the church or its leadership. In other words, everything that we do should glorify the Lord rather than promote man!

How do you point people to Christ rather than draw attention to yourself?

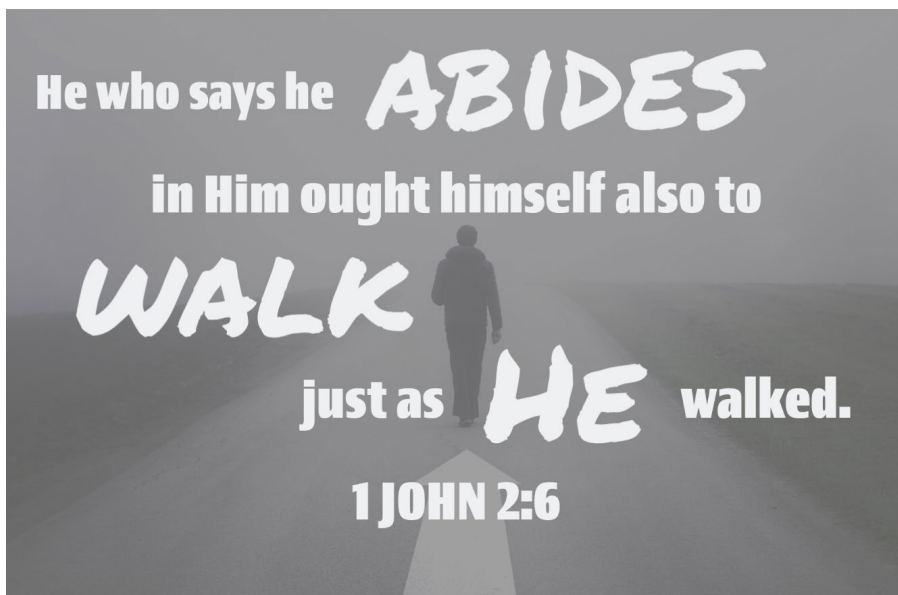
Question
2

Second, the church in Corinth promoted a spirit of competition rather than a spirit of cooperation. The members were proud of their wisdom ([1 Cor 2:4-8](#)), used their so-

called freedom in Christ to sin ([1 Cor 5:1-2](#)), and boasted in their spiritual giftedness ([chapters 12-14](#)). But the church in Corinth lived immaturely. They had failed to grow spiritually—which is the most immediate context of our passage here in chapter 3 ([1 Cor 3:1-3](#)). Overall, the church was not growing spiritually because they mimicked the world around them and had forsaken the righteous principles of the Lord. They had grievous sin in their midst which they not only tolerated, but actually celebrated ([1 Cor chapters 5-6](#)).

In [1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#), Paul laments that he cannot even speak to them as mature individuals who are progressing in their faith; he must speak to them as children who have relapsed and become more like the world rather than more like Christ as they should have. We must differentiate ourselves from the world by imitating the holiness of Jesus so that the world is able to see the dramatic transformation that God has wrought within our lives (see also [Ephesians 5:1](#); [Philippians 2:5](#); and [1 John 2:6](#)).

Above all, God has given us **grace** to participate in His Kingdom (i.e., **the Lord gave to each one**) and serve Him (vv. 4-5); He utilizes those whom He has saved and restored through His Son to carry out His extraordinary plan. In this way, He allows us to participate in ministry because He loves us—not because He needs us—for He alone is self-sufficient in accomplishing His will. In [1 Corinthians 3:10](#), Paul later explicitly describes this **grace** given to him, and all of us by extension who have a relationship with Christ. God does not need us to accomplish His will, but rather He chooses to involve us in ministry as stewards of His Kingdom because of His love and **grace** for us. Even more clearly in Ephesians 3:2 and 8, Paul writes, “Indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you . . . to me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” The term translated dispensation in Ephesians 3:2 is more aptly translated “stewardship.” Paul is a steward of the gospel and Kingdom growth. Paul, like all of us, is nothing in the grand scheme of things, but God used him to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of God’s **grace**, we should



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be good stewards of the ministry opportunities God affords us—responding joyfully to the call! Therefore, as stewards we should never become puffed up or prideful in our position, but humbly and dutifully seek to execute God’s will, remembering the main goal of the steward within the church is to cooperate with others for the express purpose of sharing the gospel to all the world.

How has God shown you grace in allowing you to serve Him? How have you acted upon that grace in your service?

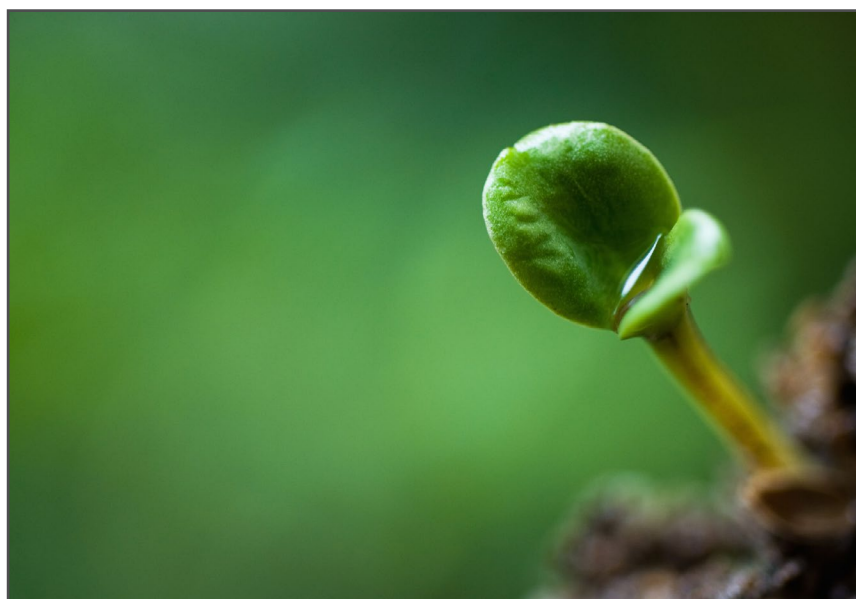
Question
3

1 Corinthians 3:6-9

THE PARTICIPATION TOGETHER:

Paul next explains that cooperation and unity, not individualism and dissension, are the key to successful Kingdom growth. He reiterates that God has called and equipped each one to minister with the same purpose: to become more like Christ in how we walk and take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Although He calls us to the same task, He equips us with different jobs and gives us different responsibilities which Paul compares to one who waters and another who plants. Yet, He clearly points to the One who orchestrates it all: **God who gives the increase.**

Paul uses an agricultural metaphor to describe ministry within the church. The one who plants, that is Paul, is the one who started or planted the church in Corinth toward



the end of his second missionary journey. The one who waters, that is Apollos, is the one who continued the teaching and discipleship within the church and under whose leadership the church continued to expand and grow. And most importantly, the one who made it grow, that is God, should receive our complete focus and attention! Therefore, the

metaphor of planting and watering refers to the spread of the gospel in Corinth which accomplishes two things: 1) introduces people into a loving relationship with Jesus

and 2) instructs them in the Word so as to produce spiritual transformation in their lives which allows the community to grow spiritually and numerically.

The point of this illustration is that we have a common goal: allowing God to work through us to build His church and mature His disciples so that the number of saints may be multiplied. The emphasis should lie upon God as the one **who gives the increase** or makes His church grow. Popular to contrary belief at times, the church grows not through pure human effort alone, but rather through divine intervention which uses us to accomplish His will. WE must actively participate and serve, but God produces growth. Several years ago, an advertising company sent a flyer to us which heralded the slogan: "How to Grow Your Church." This slogan has two problems with it. First, the church technically belongs to God, not us—we are only stewards of His church. Second, we cannot grow God's church through our own power, but rather we must rely upon Him wholly.

Therefore, we are only stewards or caretakers of that which God has equipped us to minister in His church. This agricultural illustration enables us to understand what it means to be a good steward in the Kingdom in several ways. First, it requires *everyone* to participate in ministry in order for the church to be effective. If Paul **planted** and Apollos never came to water, then it would have hindered the effective growth. Could God still have caused growth and increase, yes, but He has purposed **each one** of us to have a role in His church!

How has God chosen to use you in this local church to minister and spread the gospel?

Question
4

Second, it requires *dedication* and *persistence* to cultivate the land. If you had a garden and never added nutrients to the soil, weeded the beds, or watered the plants, eventually the soil would become useless and unproductive. It requires daily dedication to tend to the plants and ensure that they grow in a healthy manner. The same can be said of spiritual growth in the church. It's something in which we must participate daily, cultivating our lives through the study of God's Word, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and service.

Finally, it requires *patience* as the growth occurs. Although sometimes, in the first century on one hand, church growth happened instantaneously with 3000 and 5000 being added to the church in one day, for the most part it occurs over time and requires patience. We must wait upon the Lord to act to transform the minds and hearts of

Instruct

people. Even the Corinthians who had been transformed still had to grow significantly because they were participating in immature and sinful activities. And this required patience not only on God's part, but also Paul's to continue ministering without seeing much progress at times.

How do you maintain the right perspective and keep from getting discouraged when things appear to go slowly?

Question
5

1 Corinthians 3:10-11

THE PROPER FOUNDATION:

Next, Paul describes the purpose of Kingdom ministry: to point people to the one and only **foundation** for eternal life—Jesus Christ. Paul now switches from the metaphor of the farmer to one of a builder. Both references in [1 Corinthians 3:9](#), "**you are God's field; you are God's building**" refer to the church and not the individual. A steward, therefore, must see what his role is within the local body so that he may be effective in executing God's plan. Paul describes himself as a "**wise master builder**" which again denotes that he is

the one who founded the church, but more importantly he notes that the work does not stop with the **foundation**. The work began with Christ, but He continues to accomplish His work through us collectively to build His church for His glory. For this reason, Paul stresses the need for cooperation. We should see ourselves as partners together. Although we build upon the same foundation, God has assigned us with different responsibilities and gifted us differently so that we may work together to accomplish His plan.

To help us grasp this concept even more concretely, consider old-fashioned barn raisings prior to the eighteenth century. These barn-raisings serve to illustrate how we as the church ought to function. The community would come together to help a neighbor construct a barn, and even sometimes a house, so that they would have a place to work and live. Certainly, the family alone could have built the barn or house, but when the entire community came together the work that could take months happened in a day. Each person worked on a different area of the structure. Some cut and hewed the timber. Others assembled the framework for the walls while others hoisted them into place and began nailing on the siding. While some put on the

roof, others chinked between the logs. Yet, they all worked together, building upon one **foundation!**

The church functions in much the same way as this barn raising. We all collaborate, using our distinctive gifts and working in specific areas to build God's community.

Thus, Paul notes in Ephesians 4:11 when he affirms, "And He

Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Although He has equipped us to serve in different roles, we build upon the same **foundation** with the same purpose: to proclaim the gospel to the lost and inspire the church to abide by its principles to represent Christ in holiness. Some may serve in visible roles such as teaching, preaching, and greeting while others may serve behind the scenes in media, administration, providing transportation, helping others with their needs, food ministries, preparing meals, visiting the sick, and so forth. In each of our ministries, we have been tasked with pointing others to Christ and verbally sharing His gospel. Therefore, how we build upon the foundation of Christ is of utmost importance—and the theme which Paul will now address.



Specifically, how has God called you to build upon His foundation?

Question
6

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

THE PERMANENCE OF THE WORK:

Finally, Paul describes the products of both effective and ineffective Kingdom ministry in terms of the permanence of the **work**. As good stewards, we should strive to build something which will last. God Himself will test the quality of our **work** and that which is built shoddily will be burned up or destroyed (i.e., **the wood, hay, and straw**). When He tests our **work**, they will be burned up if they are not founded upon the will of Christ and their true quality will be shown in the end. In other words, churches predicated upon worldly principles or personal preferences will eventually collapse because they

Instruct

are not built upon a healthy foundation.

Why do some churches appear alive and healthy to the world, but are actually dead? How can we differentiate a living church from a dead one in these cases?

Question
7

Therefore, when Paul says, **“If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he**



himself will be saved, yet so as

through fire” (v. 15). Here, Paul refers to the church itself. If not built upon the proper foundation, the church will wither and die (this becomes clearer in [3:16-17](#)). The penalty is not the loss of salvation because Paul clearly states that the one’s whose work is burned up **“himself will be saved.”** Such churches will die “spiritually”

because they have lost their first love and become enamored with the culture around them which is ultimately headed for destruction. Movements based on the ideas and philosophies of this world will not last! Whereas the things of God will remain forever! Scripture records sage advice from the Pharisee Gamaliel when responding to the Sanhedrin’s threats to Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. Gamaliel cautions, “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God” ([Acts 5:38-39](#)).

What principles should we use to test the quality of our work?

Question
8

Broadly speaking, we can identify eight areas of shoddy craftsmanship perpetuated by some churches and individuals today which will not stand the test of time: 1) an emphasis upon programs and not Christ, 2) an emphasis on the personality of an individual instead of Christ, 3) an emphasis on attracting people through entertainment

devoid of the gospel, 4) toleration of sin and a celebration of it within the church, 5) an emphasis on legalism and ritual rather than relationship, 6) an emphasis on psychology, self-help, or human authors rather than Scripture (i.e., the power of positive thinking), 7) an emphasis on serving selfishly—serving not because of our love for God and the joy we receive from our obedience, but serving because of what we ourselves can get out of it, and 8) preaching or teaching in a spirit of competition and self-promotion rather than pointing to Christ and cooperating with the rest of His people.

What evidence of these eight areas do you see in many churches or denominations today? Do any of these describe attitudes which you may hold? If so, what should you do?

Question
9

As faithful stewards, we should build things which have eternal significance and will stand the test of time according to the will of the Lord. How is it that we can build **silver, gold, and precious stones** that remain though **tested by fire**? These are the basics to which we all ought to return daily in our lives: 1) study of God's word through both individual and corporate discipleship, 2) prayer, 3) genuine service which honors and worships the Lord and is not for self-promotion, 4) fellowship with other believers who are mature and can mentor, and 5) genuine missions and evangelism which promote a relationship not religion. Building on any other foundation will result in imminent collapse and structural failure in our lives. Above all, as good stewards we need to cultivate our relationship with Jesus and be attached solidly to His foundation to have our lives rooted on the rock when trials and difficulties arise.

Just as the skyscrapers in Manhattan need a good, solid foundation so they don't collapse in the elements, we need the same as human beings. We only have one foundation upon which we can build our lives that offers us such security: Christ, the Rock. Any other foundation will inevitably lead to destruction! God has already laid the foundation in Christ, but He has tasked us as His people to build upon it. This requires us to be good stewards! We must build wisely, using the gifts God has graciously bestowed upon us, following the principles He has clearly commanded us, and working together in unity to proclaim the gospel to the world. Stewardship, whether we're concentrating on our finances or our spiritual giftedness, centers around one purpose and goal: to minister as God leads. The way we minister may look different depending upon our giftedness and the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but we should never deviate from our foundation built upon Christ with the sole intent of bringing glory to Him collectively as His body!

Incorporate

How wisely are you building upon the foundation of Christ? Specifically, what does that look like in your life?

How has what you have built so far stood when tested? How can you use what God has done in and through you as a testimony to encourage others?

How are you a good steward of the ministry to which the Lord has called you? How is that manifested through the local church and cooperation with others?

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