

Why Give?

Introduction

Today we wrap up our series called “Return to your Roots” by ending on a very practical note. We’re going to talk today about giving. I want to be clear that the sermon today is not a sermon that will focus exclusively on tithing, though we will certainly mention it as part of what we cover. Jim and I will be preaching a series on the book of Malachi in the next few weeks, and you’re bound to hear more about tithing during that series. Today though, we’re going to talk about giving in a larger, more general sense. ...How it’s biblical, and how it’s indispensable to being a Christian, and to spreading the Gospel message throughout the world.

You’ll see ample amounts of Scripture today to show you how essential giving is. We’re going to approach the question of, “Why Give?” by talking first about how giving relates to who we are. Then, we’ll look at 3 parties to which we give, and finally, we’ll look at what exactly it is that we should give.

We Give Because of Who We Are

You may remember from last week’s sermon that being at church was not only something we were commanded to do, but it was built into who we were as people. The story with giving and who we are has some similarities. Way back in the book of Genesis, Abraham’s faith was tested, and when his faith was proven genuine, not only did God bless him in a great way, but he also made an important promise to him. Listen to what it says in **Genesis 22:17-18**:

Genesis 22:17-18 – I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring, all nations on Earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

The Earth is not blessed by our mere existence. It is blessed by our love for those around us. Today, we continue to bless all nations on earth when we continue to obey God. We bless those around us by helping to meet their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Now if you're thinking to yourself that you are not a descendant of Abraham because you're not Jewish, fear not, because remember, Jesus brought you into the family. Paul reminded us in his letter to the **Galatians** that those who have faith in Jesus Christ become spiritual children of Abraham. So as God's children, you will continue to see in a moment, giving remains an important part of obeying God.

This command to give is our inheritance as believers, and we will be a blessing to all nations so long as we continue to respond to this command. Let's begin to look next at where we give, starting with the church.

We Give to Our House

If you've ever looked at your Bibles before or are even looking at me now and asking yourself, "What's a tith-eee," well, then, I'm glad you're here today. As I said, we'll potentially cover tithing more in depth in the coming weeks, so I need to be careful not to rob of us of our own thunder. I'll make no apologies for this section of the sermon, but if you have coffee or a bottle of water with you, I'll invite you to take a drink now. This section may be a little dry and not very tasty. Nevertheless, I believe it needs to be covered.

A tithe is 10%, and more specifically, the first 10% of your income, offered to the Lord and given to the church in support of its leadership and operations. So why tithe to your home church? It's really rather simple. If this house is to stand, then we must be the ones who build and maintain it. Our money, our resources, and the upkeep of our facilities, come from no one other than us. Do you remember the illustration from **1 Peter** last week involving each of us as stones in this spiritual house? In much the same way, each of our donations and contributions help to build this literal house in which we sit today, and each of our tithes are thus important.

You know, a pastor stood before the congregation and said "I have bad news, I have good news, and I have more bad news." The congregation got quiet. "The bad news is: the church needs a new roof!" the pastor said. The congregation groaned. "The good news is: we have enough money for the new roof." A sigh of

relief was heard rippling through the gathered group. "The bad news is: it's still in your pockets."

I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, because I don't want to learn something I didn't want to know, but I'm going to ask you if church is a valuable part of your life, and I'm going to assume that because you're out there listening to me now, the answer is, "yes," or at least, "sometimes," "maybe," "or not necessarily no." Hopefully you fall into one of those categories.

Our God is a covenantal God. That means that He's into agreements between two responsible parties. Tithing doesn't stop with you giving some of your income to the church. The church, in turn, owes it to you to be good stewards of that money, using it responsibly and for the advancement of God's kingdom on Earth. You see, the grass is always greener where we water it, and if church is valuable to us... If we want our church to be vibrant and productive... If we want the church to be able to spread the gospel message into the community through missions and giving, then we first, must give. We must grow our lawn. If we've brought our hearts and our spirits to live in this place, then we must fund it to keep it in a state of good repair. It's really that simple, my friends. If church is valuable to us, then we must fund it. **If church is valuable to us, we *must* fund it.** Your 10% may be a lot, or it may be a little, but no matter what, it is an important part of the whole.



Take a look at this old stone wall. Some of the stones are large, and some are smaller, but each stone is an indispensable part of the solidarity and strength to the wall as a whole. Your 10% is no different, no matter its size. Take this sentiment home and pray about it.

We Give Inwardly

Shifting gears, we're going to talk about how giving played out in the early church. Recall that last week I talked about one of the distinctive characteristics of Christian Churches like ours is our yearning to return back to the state of the original church seen in the book of Acts and the letters that would follow as much as possible. It's a sort of, "return to a state of purity," effort, and as you can imagine, the original church certainly had giving at its core.

Hopefully, these verses look familiar to you. These are the same verses I covered last week when I spoke about the importance of the church. We're going to look at them again, *and no, it's not because this is the only Bible verse that I like. I probably like as many as 3 or even 4 Bible verses.* No, we're going to revisit this set of scripture because again, it is an iconic set of verses depicting the simplicity and purpose of the early church. Here they are:

Acts 2:42-47 – They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. ***They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*** Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

If this verse contains 6 to 8 **fundamental tenants** of what church should look like, and I believe it does, then we see that right in the middle of them, right at the heart of what church is, is giving. This sentiment of what overall is best described as **sharing** is echoed later in the book of Acts, in verse 4:32 which says:

Acts 4:32 - All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

We see the church giving to one another in these verses. You see, we call ourselves brothers and sisters because **the church is not meant to be a social club. It's meant to be a family.** We need to watch out for one another through difficult times as a family would. A good example would be the way I have seen churches come together when a member of their family has a house fire. People

often donate money and furniture to help that person get back on their feet. God forbid we are faced with such a situation here at Tri-County, but if we are, how would we respond? As we go about our days, we certainly need to keep one another in mind. You may also recall that I talked about the importance of “one another” in my talk about the church last week. “One anothers” are as essential to giving as they are to the concept of church.

We Give Outwardly

Let’s look at another biblical example. This one is straight from the mouth of Jesus Himself. Jesus is my favorite source to quote because quite frankly, He’s always right and He’s never wrong. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 25:31 and I’ll read His words:

Matthew 25:31-40 – "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'LORD, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

A couple of lessons here. First... Don’t be a goat, be a sheep... More importantly, there are people on the fringes of society...There are people who are homeless, people who are hungry and thirsty, people who struggle even for basic needs such as clothing, and strangers, oh there are so many strangers whom we can ultimately ignore, or, we can play a critical role in their lives. We are called specifically, by our Lord, to give to these people.

James echoes this point later in the Bible when he says:

James 2:14-17 - What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Presented as a counterpoint, this is a good picture of what our faith looks like if we don't give. What does James say about our faith when it's not accompanied by action? He says it's dead! One commentator notes that, "action is the proper fruit of living faith." This notion of not giving is looking worse and worse by the minute! If we try to walk a Christian life without giving, not only are we goats, but we're goats with a dead faith?! ...I don't know about you, but I'm feeling now more than ever that I'd rather be a sheep. ...One on the right to whom God will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We have to be good stewards of what God so graciously gives to us by in turn giving it back and giving it forward. I'm going to say that again. We have to be good stewards of what God so graciously gives to us by in turn giving it back, and giving it forward. This concept of giving is also critical to our Christian witness. **People aren't going to believe a thing that we tell them about a generous God if we ourselves are not living lives of generosity. Remember that!**

Know What We Give

We've talked about whom we give to as Christians. Now I want to talk about what we can give. Here are 4 rapid-fire bullet points on what we can give.

1. First, our money. Give it wisely, give it to good stewards, like the church, who will turn it into something worthy of a Godly offering. Another great thing about money is that you can turn it into things. You can turn it into food, and into clothing, and into any number of things mentioned in the verse we read from James. Think about what you turn your money into in any given day. Could you be doing it a better way?
2. Next, our time. Believe it or not, time has become a more precious commodity than money in our society. I'm sure I don't have to tell you that in general, you're probably leading a pretty busy life. Keith Wooden, the pastor of the church that sent me to you, recently said that it is not always

your ability that is critical to giving, but rather it is your availability. You can't underestimate the value that you contribute just by showing up, and being present and willing to help!

3. Our talents. The beautiful thing about a room full of Christians is that it is a room full of people with so many different skills, talents and leadings. Whether you're gifted to pray aloud with others, gifted to play a guitar, blessed with the ability to rock a kitchen, or any number of other areas, your talents and skills were given to you, by God, so that you could use them to bless the world. Giving within the sphere of your own talents and gifts can be a real blessing for you too. If you can give in a way that you enjoy and are able, it'll be fun, not work!
4. Last, our resources. Ask yourselves, what 'things' do you have that can be used to build the kingdom?

To illustrate this last point, I want to tell you a story about my mission trip to the Philippines a few years ago. For me it was a story of availability, because I didn't have any talents that applied to our projects. I was just a guy who heard God's call to missions and said, "okay," and that's all you need to be to be a missionary too.



We flew out to, among other things, install a couple of Sawyer brand gravity driven water filters onto some giant drums that would catch rainwater in the community. The water tables in the Philippines are all very contaminated, but they get so much rainfall a year that if their rainwater could be cleaned, it would be potable drinking water.

Here's a shot of the barrels. These are in a large metal frame that we anchored with cement. The filters are drilled in behind us. We spent something less than \$60 on two of these, and the filters inside would provide them with 10 or so years of clean drinking water.



When we were in Dallas waiting on our connecting flight, we happened upon a man, I think he was a rancher, from Texas. Through conversation, we told him where we were going and what we were doing, and by the grace of God's divine appointment, he said something to the effect of, "I have a bunch of those water filters just sitting on a palette in a warehouse collecting dust." From then, talks led to how he might be able to donate to our cause, and ultimately, the sustainability of clean drinking water in a struggling nation.

My point is this: Never underestimate the usefulness of what you may have tucked away somewhere. It may have become useless to you, but it may be lifesaving to someone else. For me, it may be shirts. I'll make a little confession about myself now. I am a t-shirt addict. Everywhere I go, if there is a shirt to say that I've been there, my wife will attest that I usually have to buy it. If there was a shirt that said "Middletown, Indiana" or even "Mechanicsburg Road", I would probably buy it. In the end, I have more shirts than I'll ever wear, and so many that we barely have room for them. There are a lot of people in this world, and they're not even far away, that need shirts. What are the t-shirts of your life? Is there anything you tend to collect a lot of but don't end up using? ...Take the challenge. Go home and take a look around your houses and your garages. What's collecting dust in your life that might be a blessing in someone else's?

Conclusion

Wrapping up, I just want to let you know that it's been my experience that giving feels wonderful. Have any of you felt that sensation when you've given to someone in the past? We shouldn't be surprised. Quite frankly, we were meant to give. When we do as we're meant to... When we act as we were made too, we fall into harmony with God, and being in harmony with God is an amazing blessing. In the end, I could never see myself standing before the God who made me, the God who saved me, and the God who blesses and guides me daily, and asking, "Why should I give?" Look at what God has done for us. Haven't we been given to so extravagantly by Him? So extravagantly!!! We must pay it forward into our world. Jesus reminds us in **Matthew 10:8...**

Matthew 10:8 – Freely you have received; freely give.

Don't let this message pass you by. Let it affect who you are, and what you will go out into the world and do... Today... Tomorrow... And into your future...

Invitation

If you want a life characterized by your love for others, and you don't know God, you can start this life of extravagant love and giving today by first receiving the greatest gift ever given to man... The salvation and love of Jesus Christ. Christ loves you and he wants to pour into your life so that you could be a blessing to the people around you. The time is now. If you're hesitating, ask yourself what it is that is holding you back. I promise you that whatever it is, it's not worth the love and salvation that you would lose if you don't accept Christ's gift. If you want to make that decision today, come forward and meet with me. I'd love to know your name and talk with you about what this would mean for your life. God loves you.