

GOSPEL GIVING

Giving is not God's way of raising money. It's his way of raising children.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

THE LAW

Firstfruits

The firstfruits of all produce went to the priests. (Num. 18:12-13)

Sacrifices

Food left over from sacrifices was given to the priests. (Num. 18)

Tithes

The Levite Tithe (Numbers 18): The people gave 10 percent of all their yield to the Levite priests.

The Festival Tithe (Deuteronomy 14): After the people entered the Promised Land, a second 10-percent of everything from the land was required. This second tithe was to be used for a worship feast. The purpose of the tithe was "that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always" (Deut 14:23).

Festivals

Annual Festivals: The people would gather for three huge parties each year, the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Booths. They were required to bring a freewill offering (Deut. 16).

Freewill Offerings: People could give whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted.

Sabbath Year

The Israelites could not plant anything every seventh year (Lev. 25), a 14.3 percent sacrifice of their earning power. Imagine giving your entire salary away every seventh year, and trusting God to provide!

Provision for the Poor

God told the Israelites to leave some of their crops unharvested so that poor people, widows and orphans, and foreigners could collect the leftover harvest and eat (Lev. 19; Deut. 24).

The approximate total giving under the Law was 25 to 35 percent. The point of the Law is that God is our provider. He grows the crops. He brings the rain. He gave us the land. God has delivered us and been kind to us, so we will in turn be kind and generous to those in need. We are blessed to be a blessing.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus

Matthew 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." Jesus says, "The Law is important—keep tithing—but don't just legalistically conform to the Law. God wants your hearts!"

Acts

After the death and resurrection of Jesus and the sending of his Spirit, God's people were radically generous! They sold what they owned to make sure everyone had their needs met.

Acts 2:44-45: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."

Acts 4:32-34: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

Keep in mind these people were Jews who had lived under the Law prior to the coming of Jesus. And the gospel motivated them to give more, not less!

WHO SHOULD I GIVE TO? HOW MUCH?

Often people ask, "What percentage should I give to the church, and what percentage should I give to other good causes?" A fully formed biblical theology should lead us to support our local church first, and with the biggest chunk of our giving.

In the Old Testament, all of the sacrifices and the firstfruit offerings met the needs of the priests, while there was one specific tithe set aside to meet the needs of the Levites (the guys who cared for the tabernacle and the temple). Meeting the needs of these servant leaders, was the top priority.

In Acts, the people laid the money down at the Apostles' feet and entrusted them to distribute it as needed (Acts 4:34-35).

Paul makes it clear that as a church family, we have an obligation to care for those who are leading us and teaching us (1 Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6-7; 1 Tim. 5:17-25).

There are countless opportunities to invest in strategic, gospel-centered ministries around the world. We must ensure first, however, that we are fulfilling our responsibility to care for those who are leading us and teaching us before we consider the other ways that God wants us to distribute his resources.

GOSPEL GIVING

THE GOSPEL AFFECTS EVERYTHING

The Scriptures are very clear. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). To belong to Jesus means we are free to no longer be a slave to anyone or anything but him.

Many of us live as though we are still in bondage to money. We hoard it. We become consumed by it. We fear losing it. We become anxious that we will not make enough. Instead of being free to use money for his purposes, we become enslaved to it.

When we fully believe and embrace the gospel, we approach money and giving very differently. We realize that we don't really own anything, because everything we have is his. Then again, we really own everything because all that is his is now ours in Jesus Christ!

Jesus became poor for our sakes so that in his poverty we could become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). When we get this, we become willing to give so that others can be taken care of. We understand that we have nothing to lose because everything that is his is securely held in heaven for us.

The reality is that none of us is ever sacrificing anything when we give money, time, possessions or our talents because we really don't own anything—it's all his. So what we're really doing is just using all that is his for his glory. It's not a sacrifice, but a privilege.

Some Basics on Gospel Giving

- **We give to our church.** We release our giving into the hands of local church leadership. (Num. 18:27-29; Lev. 23:9-14; Acts 4:32-37, 6:1).
- **We give first.** We are to seek first God's Kingdom—a firstfruits principle—not worrying about what will eat or drink, but trusting that he will take care of our needs (Matt. 6:33).
- **We give generously.** (2 Cor. 8)
- **We grow by giving.** As we give, we release our grip on our idols because we trust God more and more.
- **Giving is freedom.** It was for freedom that Christ set us free (Gal. 5:1). Faithful obedience is freedom.
- **Giving is good for us.** Giving benefits the giver, not just the beneficiary. (2 Cor. 8)
- **Giving is a joy.** We give as a joyful response to what God has given us in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8).
- **The tithe is a tutor.** Although we are no longer under the Law, we let the tithe be a tutor for where we might begin in our giving and a revealer of how we still need to grow in Christ.
- **It is all God's anyway.** Everything we have comes from God and belongs to God, therefore we are not really sacrificing anything when we give (Jas. 1:17; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 12:1-2).
- **We support our church leaders.** We are to support those who serve us in the equipping and training of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6-7; 1 Tim. 5:17-25).
- **Our giving grows over time.** We should grow in our giving as we more fully embrace the gospel. (Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 2:44-45, 3:34-35)

Some Diagnostic Questions

When do I give? After I've paid all of my bills or before?

The principal of firstfruits informs us that our faith in God to provide leads us to give to him first (Exod. 13:1-2; Lev. 23:9-14; Deut. 18:1-5). Jesus commands us to seek first the kingdom of God and trust that all our needs will be taken care of (Matt. 6:33). God gave Jesus, his firstborn, so that we might be his children. If God would do this with his own Son, why wouldn't we give first to him?

Does my giving demonstrate that I believe God is generous?

God did not give us what we deserve. He was merciful and gracious by gifting us with much more than we deserve. God is generous!

Does my giving demonstrate that I believe the gospel?

Since we have received unearned favor from God, we should because of what we have received from him. Holding on to our money cannot make us more significant, secure, or accepted. The gospel tells us that we are now fully secure in God's hands and the most loved and accepted that we could ever be.

Is my giving legalistic, licentious, or gospel-informed & Spirit-led?

Legalistic: "The Old Testament commanded to give 10 percent to the temple in order to meet the standard of righteousness, so I also tithe with the desire to measure up to the Law."

Licentious: "The tithe was an Old Testament thing. I give whatever I feel like whenever I feel like it."

Gospel-informed & Spirit-led:

"My righteousness does not come from my obedience to the Law, but from Jesus', so I am free from trying to measure up to the Law. When I trust in my ability to meet the standard of the tithe to make me

righteous, I do not believe the gospel. I am not my own. I was purchased by Jesus and his death for me, so I realize that all that I have I should give to him. In that case a tithe is really not enough.

I ask the Holy Spirit how much I should give of his money and joyfully give what he tells me. I let the Law be both a tutor, showing me where to begin, and an indicator of my heart, showing me that I still am in need of Jesus to save me from my greed and selfishness.” God is making me more like Jesus as I give.

When giving money do I release it or try to control it?

Do I trust the elders of New City to determine where it is best spent or do I want to make that call myself? In the Old Testament, the people brought the money to the temple. The New Testament does not indicate that this ceased. In the New Testament, the church also brought offerings to the apostles or elders of the church, entrusting it into their hands for its best use.

One of the ways God grows us is by calling us to submit to the leadership he places over us. One way he does that is through our giving. Do I trust God with my money when I release it? Do I trust that he is in control of the leadership as well?

If the people I’m leading followed my example of giving, where would we be as a church? A gospel community? A family?

All of us speak with authority about what we *really* believe and obey. The opposite is often true as well. We are often silent about what we are not obeying faithfully. How we give directly affects the level of commitment, follow-through, responsibility, and ownership of the mission of those we’re leading. A student when fully taught resembles their teacher (Luke 6:40).

Let’s ask ourselves, do we have the integrity to call anyone else to support the work of the local church? If we were leading a church, would we have the integrity to take an offering?

FAQ

Why do we pay our pastors or some of our staff? And who gets paid?

Paul says that those who proclaim the gospel should make their living from the gospel—that they should be able to eat and live from the giving of the church (1 Cor. 9:1-14). He also says that those who are taught the word should share all good things with the one who teaches (Gal. 6:6-7). To Timothy, he says that the elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5). “The laborer deserves his wages.”

New City elders equip the church for the work of ministry through preaching, prayer, teaching, counseling, and leadership development. Some of our elders are paid full-time salaries, some part-time. Some are unpaid. We also have paid staff whose work supports this equipping work.

Do we have a large percentage going to elders or staff?

Yes. Because we don’t have a lot of our money going to buildings or programs, the largest percentage is for elders or staff. The elders and staff we pay multiply ministry and mission because they are primarily responsible for equipping and sending the body. In that sense the majority of our money is going to training leaders, identifying and equipping church planters, coaching and mentoring and supporting the ministry of gospel communities.

How do financial decisions get made?

The elders oversee how money is spent. We have a budget that is agreed upon by the elders, after much prayer and discussion, and money is allotted accordingly. The budget is published annually.