

Giving



**A Series of Four Bible Studies
by
Roger Green**

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Introduction

We can have all sorts of reactions when people start talking about money but the truth is that money looms large in our thoughts. We spend a lot of time thinking about it, about how much we have, how much we need, how much we earn, how much we spend. The New Testament has a lot to say about money and what it says is quite remarkable because it is the opposite to what we normally think about money.

However, this short series of Bible studies is not just about money, it is about giving. The first study seeks to explore what God has given to us. It is as we see the riches that we have in Christ, that our grasp on the things of this world begins to loosen. We discover, as Jesus said, “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). Giving and contentment are two sides of the same coin. Together they represent the positive alternative to greed. If contentment calls a halt to the ‘grabbing’ dimension of greed, giving addresses its ‘keeping’ aspect. Giving turns out to be far more central to Christian living and identity than might first appear. The second study challenges us to think about where we place our trust. Jesus says we can only have one master ‘God or ‘money’. Living in a money-centred society is not easy. Ultimately it is God who knows our hearts and whether or not we are more focused on storing up riches here on earth or investing in the Kingdom of Heaven. God has entrusted to each one of us treasure, talents and time and he calls in us to use them wisely. This is the focus of the third study. The final study looks at some practical principles for our giving and challenges us to think not just what we give but why we give, for God loves a generous and cheerful giver.

Roger Green

1

True Riches

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

2 Corinthians 8:9

Talkabout

What is one of the most special gifts that you have ever been given? What made it special?
or

What examples of people’s generosity have excited and influenced you? What was it about their giving that inspired you?

Investigate & Apply

1. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. Use this passage as a starting point to describe some of the blessings (the riches) we possess as Christians. (In your group you might like to write them on a whiteboard or some butcher’s paper.)
2. Read Psalm 73. In what ways does the Psalmist struggle? What does he give thanks for? Where is his treasure found?
3. How does suffering and hardship challenge your view of God’s kindness and generosity?
4. Read Philippians 4:10-13. What is the secret of contentment that the Apostle Paul has learned? In what areas are you tempted to be discontent?

5. In the light of God's kindness and grace how does God want us to live? (Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 5:2, 1 John 3:16-18). How does this translate for you into daily living?
6. In what ways do we reflect the character of God when we give?
7. *"There are two great obstacles to sharing. The first is greed. We want more and more for ourselves. Greed is self-centred, and can only be cured by God. We must call upon him in prayer to give us his Holy Spirit so that our attitudes to life may agree with his character. God himself is a giving God. He gives us everything to enjoy fully. He has given us his Son to be our saviour. When we love God we will be able to love our brother, so we will rise above greedy and selfish use of our money and share our resources with those who have real need. Greediness grows if encouraged – we may be surprised how greedy we have become without noticing it.*
The other obstacle to sharing our money is fear. We are frightened that we will leave ourselves short if we give it away; not short perhaps in the present, because we can estimate that, but in the future with all its uncertainties. The answer to this sort of fear is faith in God's faithfulness in the future. It is he who has given us our present possessions and he has promised that if we seek to do his will, he will give to us what we need when we need it. God is in control of every event in our world, including the business world, and the world of our own private life. He has promised us heaven and a wonderful heavenly inheritance and Christians should live in the light of that promise. He has promised provision for the rest of this life that is this side of heaven, and we should live in the light of that promise as well." (D.B. Knox, 'The Briefing' Issue 251)

How do you respond to the quote above? Do you agree that greed and fear are the two great obstacles to our sharing? Are there other obstacles that you are aware of? What holds you back from sharing more of what God has given you with others?

Prayer

Begin your prayer time by thanking God for all that he has given you. (You may like to use some of your answers to question one as you pray.)

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can not serve both God and Money.”

Matthew 6:24

Talkabout

“Money is what drives him, what he lives for, what has always served as the scorecard of his success. One friend observed “His self esteem is the net present value of his assets”. This was hardly surprising since money was the only measure his father had ever taught him. Like Kerry before him, James had been driven by a desire to match his father, to beat him, or at the very least to earn his respect and praise.”

Article on James Packer in the SMH October, 2009

We might not have the dollars of James Packer but in what ways is it easy for us to get caught in the money trap?

Investigate

1. What do the following passages say about our attitude towards money & wealth?

(i) Deuteronomy 8:6-18

(ii) 1 Chronicles 29:10-19

(iii) Psalm 49:16-20

(iv) Proverbs 11:4,18&28, 16:8&16, 23:4-5, 30:7-9

Read Luke 18:18-30.

2. Jesus' interaction with the Ruler seems to turn on the question of inheriting eternal life (v18). Why do you think Jesus first draws the Ruler's attention to the Old Testament commandments? What do you make of the Ruler's declaration that he has obeyed the commandments since he was a boy?

3. This is the only recorded occasion where Jesus calls a person to actually give up everything and give to the poor before following him. Why do you think Jesus asked this man to give up all before becoming a disciple?

At the beginning of verse 22 Jesus says that the Ruler lacks one thing. What is it that he lacks?

4. No matter which way you look at it, it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. In the same way, in verse 27, Jesus says it is humanly impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but for God it is possible. What do you think Jesus is trying to teach here?

Apply

1. What pressure does money (or lack of money) put on . . .
 your relationships with other people?
 your relationship with God?

2. What key attitudes towards money have come out of this study for you?

3. How are these attitudes going to be worked out in your own life?
 - (i) In general terms . . .

 - (ii) In relation to a specific decision you are facing at present . . .

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”
Matthew 6:19-21

Talkabout

Decide what your most valuable possession is. What instructions would you leave if you had to get someone to look after it? What is the difference between being a caretaker and an owner?

Investigate & Apply

Read Matt 6:19-34

1. Jesus is giving his disciples some advice on wise investing. What do you think he means when he says “store up treasures in heaven” (v20) and “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (v33)?

Read Luke 19:11-27

2. Jesus tells this parable to equip his disciples for the time when he will be away from them. It is an instruction about what to do while we wait for Jesus return. What do you think is the main idea of Jesus' parable?
3. The muscles of your body illustrate the 'Use it or Lose it' principle. The more they are used, the stronger they become, but if they are not used at all they waste away. Where do you see the 'Use it or Lose it' principle in the parable?

4. In v25 the crowd seems to object to the apparent injustice of the 'Use it or Lose it' principle. The King's response is somewhat startling to the modern reader. Why do you think Jesus concludes the parable this way?

5. As God's servants what are some of the minas that God has given to us?

(Someone has summarised these God given 'minas as our time, our talents and our treasure. Are there any on your list that do not fit one of these categories?)

6. What specifically do you think God has entrusted to you? How are using what God has given to you?

7. Are the right price tags on the right things in your life and ambitions?

4

Biblical Principles for Giving

“But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you excel in the grace of giving.”

2 Corinthians 8:7

Talkabout

Discuss. What are our major sources of income and expenditure at your church? What are the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of various ways of giving (e.g Direct debit, the envelope system, cash in the bag etc)?

Investigate & Apply

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 & 9:1-15

1. It seems that the Macedonian Churches were model ‘givers’ among the early churches (Roms 15:25-28). In what way did they ‘surprise’ Paul? What principles do you see governing their attitude towards giving?
2. What is the example Paul offers in 8:8-9? How is our attitude of giving related to the gospel?
3. *“Your offering is a seed. The apostle Paul said when we give money to God’s work, He turns it into a living seed. (2 Corinthians 9:6). Your offering is a gift to your heavenly Father. It is also a seed. When you plant (give), you can expect it (your offering) to bring a financial harvest of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and even a hundredfold into your life.”* (John Avanzini, The Avanzini Report – Read it & Reap it)

What is the problem with the quote above? Does God bless our obedience and faithfulness? If so, in what way does he do this?

- List the principles on giving that Paul set before the Corinthians? How do these principles apply to us? Are there other principles in Scripture that are important? (e.g Matt 6:1-4, Luke 21:1-4, 1 Cor. 9:3-14, 1 Cor. 16:1-4)
- In the Old Testament the Jews were obligated to give a tenth (a ‘tithe’) of everything they earned towards the ongoing operation of the temple. This was just the starting point of giving for the people of God, before freewill offerings and acts of generosity. In the New Testament this ‘tithe’ is never placed upon believers, nor is the principle specifically revoked. Do you think Christians should ‘tithe’ Why or why not? (You might like to refer to the article on ‘How Much Should I Give?’ at the end of this booklet.)
- Share one or two things that have stood out to you or challenged you from this series of studies?



Why Give To My Local Church?

There are a number of good reasons why Christians give money to their local Church.

1. Stewardship

Everything I own belongs to God and I am accountable to him for the way I use it. This is emphasised in Jesus stewardship parables (Matt 25:14-21; Luke 19:11-27, where the good steward of his master's wealth is commended while the bad(stingy) steward suffers judgment. We are to store up riches for ourselves in the Kingdom of Heaven instead of here on earth. (Luke 6:24,12:16-21,16:19-31,18:18-30). When Jesus speaks of this kind of stewardship, he has in mind our whole lives, not just our money. In this sense, it is true that our use of money can be an indicator of our deeper spiritual condition.

2. As an expression of gratitude to God

Though he was infinitely 'rich', Jesus made himself poor so that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Financial giving is often an expression of thanksgiving to God for salvation and material abundance in this life.

3. Fleeing From Greed

Christians also give in order to free themselves from the tyranny of greed- wealth can be a trap! (Eph 5:3-10, 1 Tim 6:3-10, James 1:10-11, 5:1-6)

4. Our obligations to our church staff

Christians have an obligation to share all good things with those whose work it is to teach and preach. This has always been the practice of the Christian church, which found a precedent in the Old Testament temple system of priests and tithes (1 Tim 5:17-18, 1 Cor. 9:3-14, Gal.6:6).

5. Compassion for the poor

Christians are to give generously to the poor as a demonstration of the grace God has shown to us (2 Cor 8-9, Provs 19:17, 22:9). This was the practice of Christians from the very beginning, first of all to those within the Christian community, and then to all people generally (Acts 4:32-37, Gal 6:10).

6. Strategic Gospel Partnerships

The wise steward will want to get the greatest gospel return for his or her investment. We share in the gospel work of others when we partner with them financially. Not all of us are evangelists, preachers, missionaries or youth workers but we set them free to do the job to which God has called and equipped them when we commit to supporting them financially (Phil 1:3-7, 4:10-20).

Other Obligations

Christian giving also occurs in the context of other financial obligations that we have to governments (Roms 13:1-17), to our families (1 Tim 5:3-16), to be prudent (Provs 6:6-11, 27:23-27 and to support ourselves (1 Thess 4:11-12). Without ignoring these obligations, Christians are to be generous and free in their giving – for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7)



How Much Should I Give?

The tithe is clearly taught in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament it seems to be downplayed. Are those of us who give 10 percent of our income doing something not required?

A simple yes or no to this question would be horribly misleading.

We know that the law of Moses mandated the tithe (see Lev. 27:30-33), at least in part to support the ministry of the Levites (Num. 18:21-24). Like many other laws, however, it was frequently observed in the breach, although the prophets insisted that failure to pay the tithe was nothing less than robbing God (Mal. 3:6-12).

There were also offerings to be paid. Moreover, faithful Israelites were to be generous with their alms, so that the poor of the land were supported.

In practice, the prophets found themselves speaking against greed and social injustice (e.g., Amos) and against a raw form of capitalism that squeezed out the poor (Isa. 5:8-10). In other words, even within the Old Testament we should be careful not to isolate the tithe from broader demands of generosity and social justice.

The only passage in the New Testament that explicitly authorizes the tithe does so in a rather backhanded way: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices. ... But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" (Matt. 23:23, NIV). Jesus' primary point, of course, is to criticize the scrupulous tithing of even a few herbs grown in the back garden if it is at the expense of fundamental issues of justice, integrity, and mercy. But one might have expected Jesus to say, "You should have practiced the latter, and let the herbs take care of themselves"—or some thing equally dismissive. Instead, he says, "You should have practiced the latter, *without neglecting the former*."

After the Cross and the Resurrection, the New Testament provides no passage with the same explicit conclusion. That raw fact leads to all the usual debates about the nature of the continuity and discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

Does the tithe continue as a divine mandate because it has not been explicitly abrogated? Or is it part of the "old order" that is passing away?

However we resolve that broad question, all sides agree that some New Testament writers insist that Christians be a giving, generous people (1 Tim. 6:18). So, at very least, we must insist that believers under both covenants are expected to give generously.

Some may wonder, *Is the dispute about nothing more than the amount? Is there something about 10 percent that is entrenched in moral law?*

The following two points will help focus the issue.

1. **Beware of pride.** There is always a great spiritual danger in thinking that if in some area we have satisfied a specific, concrete demand we have done everything that God requires. Ten percent is a lot of money to some folks; to others it's not very much. Isn't that one of the lessons to be learned from Jesus' comments about the widow's mite? To suppose that God demands 10 percent—and nothing more—can itself foster a remarkably independent and idolatrous attitude: "This bit is for God, and the rest is mine by right." Likewise, if you choose to give more than 10 percent, you may become inebriated from the contemplation of your own generosity.

2. *Remember why you're giving.* A strictly legal perspective on giving soon runs into a plethora of complicated debates. Is this 10 percent of gross income or of net? How does this play out in a country where a progressive income-tax system rises to 90 percent of income? If we choose to tithe from our net income, are we talking "take-home pay" only, or does it include what is withheld for medical insurance and retirement benefits?

It would be easy to list such questions for a page or two without ever asking, "How can I manage my affairs so that I can give more?" That is surely a better question than "What's the correct interpretation so that I can do whatever's required and then get on with my life?"

Christians will want to acknowledge with gratitude that they are mere stewards of all that they "possess." Moreover, New Testament ethics turn not so much on legal prescription as on lives joyfully submitted to God.

This is why the most penetrating New Testament passage on giving is 2 Cor. 8-9. Under severe trial, the Corinthians' "overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (8:2). Even so, they first gave themselves to the Lord (8:5).

So, why not aim for 20 percent in your giving? Or 30? Or more, depending on your circumstances (8:12)? "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ... for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (8:9).

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Points for Prayer
