

Defined by Generosity  
1 Timothy 6:17-19  
November 13, 2011

## **Introduction.**

### **Show Goodsense Offering Video.**

Do you have any of those feelings during the offering each Sunday?

Giving of our finances often causes us to wrestle with internal feelings. We want to give, but how much should we give? How much can I afford to give? Every request sounds like a worthy cause, which one do I choose? I can't afford to give to everything, so who do I say yes to and who do I say no to?

Despite the internal struggle we may feel when we are asked to give, God has made us to be generous.

## **I. A Theological Foundation for a Generous Life**

### **A. Created to Be Generous; Tempted to Hoard**

God created us with the willingness to give—to God and to others. This design is part of our makeup; we actually have the need to be generous. Yet there are two voices that “war” against our God-given impulse toward generosity, tempting us to keep or hoard what we have.

#### **1. The voice of fear.**

The first voice is the voice of fear. This fear comes from different places. We fear that we cannot take care of ourselves and families in the present and over the long haul. I am going to have to put my kids through college. I have retirement to think of. What will my family do if something happens to me? We fear that we will not be able to provide for our basic needs. I have all of these bills that I need to make sure I can pay: the house & car payments. Heating costs are going up this winter. We fear the depletion of our financial resources.

As we have learned over the last few weeks, it is essential learn contentment and delayed gratification so that we save and maintain some control of our spending. Then we will be more able to take care of these needs and be prepared for the unexpected expenses that may arise. We are to be prepared for the unknown, but we do not need to live in fear of it. When we are fearful of all of these unknowns, it can mean that we are not fully trusting God with our lives and circumstances. If we live in a state of constant worry and fear about what might happen to us, that worry and fear may come from the feeling that we are

not in control. The fact is we are not in control. It is important to recognize that God is the one in control.

Living in fear of what might happen to us, along with a misplaced idea about the true source of our security, keeps us from being generous and leads us to hoard what we have. The truth is that hoarding offers us no real security in this world.

## **2. The voice of self-gratification.**

The second voice that wars against our impulse to give is the voice of self-gratification. Our culture tells us

that our lives consist in the abundance of our possessions and pleasurable experiences. So we find ourselves thinking, If I give, there won't be enough left for me. We need to take care of ourselves and meet our needs. It is okay to enjoy life and buy nice things that we like. The danger of self-gratification is that it feeds the feeling that our happiness and joy in life comes from our possessions, so we accumulate more and more stuff in hopes of leading a fulfilled life. The pursuit of self-gratification becomes an endless journey since God is the only thing that can fully satisfy our longing for meaning and purpose.

## **B. Defeating the Voices**

When we give our lives to Christ, invite him to be Lord, and allow the Holy Spirit to begin changing us from the inside out, we find that our fears begin to disappear and our aim in life shifts from seeking personal pleasure to pleasing God and caring for others. Although we still may wrestle with the voices from time to time, we are able to silence them more readily and effectively the more we grow in Christ. And the more we grow in Christ, realizing

that our lives belong to him, the more generous we become. Generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth.

### **C. Biblical Reasons to Give to God and Others**

The Bible gives several reasons for giving to God and others. The Old Testament teaches that “Life is a gift, and everything belongs to God.” (Psalm 24:1; Leviticus 25:23) From the teachings of the Bible, we learn that everything we have and are is a gift from God, even life itself. All that we are, we owe to God. We haven’t earned any of it on our own. Actually, we don’t even own our

things or even our lives. It all belongs to God and we are God's stewards or managers of God's resources.

We also learn from the Bible that giving will bring joy and meaning to our lives. Acts 20:35 says "We find more joy in doing things for other people and for God than we ever did in doing things for ourselves." Matthew 16:25 says, "In the very act of losing our lives, we find life." We hear so many people say that they receive so much through their giving to others. I find that to be true. I find such joy when I give of my finances and time to help

others. Going on the Maine Mission Trip, helping in the Food Pantry, with Thanksgiving baskets, volunteering at the MIHN Shelter, helping build a Habitat for Humanity house, supporting United Methodist Committee on Relief and my general giving to the church have called for a bit of a sacrifice on my part, but I have gotten so much more in return by making the sacrifice. God is faithful to keep his promise that we will be given much more back in meaning, in purpose, and in joy.

## **D. Biblical Guidelines for Giving**

We have a desire to be generous but how much should we give back to God. The Bible has some guidelines for giving. From the early days of the Old Testament, God's people observed the practice of giving some portion of the best of what they had to God. A gift offered to God was called the first fruits or the tithe, and it equaled one-tenth of one's flocks or crops or income. Abraham was the first to give a tithe or tenth. Jacob followed the same pattern in his giving back to God and

the tithe became a standard that Old Testament law prescribed for people in making their offering back to God.

## **1. Giving a tithe.**

As Christians who live under the new covenant, we are not bound by the Law of Moses; we look to it as a guide. Yet most Christians agree that the tithe is a good guideline for our lives, and one that is pleasing to God.

We see that people in the Old Testament gave the tithe. But what does God expect of us today? Most of us Christians look back at the Old Testament tithe and

consider that still to be a tithe for our lives as well. That tenth goes to accomplish the work of God's kingdom through the church. And the church, then, is responsible for praying and discerning how to best use that tenth for God's ministry. The leaders who are in charge of our church's finances are responsible for asking, "What does God want to do through us in the next year- through the resources that you have committed to God?" Even though we think the tithe is a good guide, it's a challenge. Here is a video by Adam Hamilton that demonstrates this point.

**Show video clip "Tithing and the Ten Apples."**

Though tithing can be a struggle, it is possible at virtually every income level. If you cannot tithe right away, take a step in that direction. Perhaps you can give 2 percent or 5 percent or 7 percent. God understands where you are, and God will help you make the adjustments necessary for you to become more and more generous.

## **2. Giving beyond the tithe.**

The tithe is not the ultimate goal for our giving. In the Bible, tithing is a floor, not a ceiling for our giving. God

calls us to grow beyond the tithe. We should strive to set aside an additional percentage of our income as offerings for other things that are important to us, such as mission projects, schools, church building funds, and other nonprofit organizations.

## **II. What Our Giving Means to God**

### **A. How Does Our Giving Affect God?**

From the earliest biblical times, the primary way people worshipped God was by building an altar and offering the fruit of one's labors upon it to God. They

would burn the sacrifice of an animal or grain as a way of expressing their gratitude, devotion, and desire to honor God. The scent of the offering was said to be pleasing to God. It wasn't that God loved the smell of burnt meat and grain. Rather, God saw that people were giving a gift that expressed love, faith, and the desire to please and honor God; and this moved God's heart. What is our attitude when we give back to God? It gives me great joy to take our children out to buy a Christmas present for Shelley and to receive a Christmas gift from our children. They want to spend their own money on the gift, and they look

hard to select the gift that they think will be the perfect one. The time and effort they put into it and that they want to spend their own money rather than have us pay for it shows me that the gift is a symbol of their love for Shelley and me.

2 Corinthians 9:7 says You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." When given in this spirit, our offerings bless the Lord. What does the attitude of your heart say about your giving to God?

## **B. What is God's response to our giving?**

What is God's response to our giving? In Luke 6:38

Jesus says "Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap.

The amount you give will determine the amount you get back." In Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus speaks of a master who went on a trip and entrusted his money to his servants. To those who were faithful stewards, he gave them more. When we prove ourselves trustworthy with

the little that God gives us, God will entrust us with more.

We will never give more than what God gives back to us.

### **III. How Our Generosity Affects Us**

#### **A. Through It Our Hearts Are Changed**

How does our generosity affect us? When we are generous—to God and to our families, friends, neighbors, and others who are in need—our hearts are filled with joy.

They are enlarged by the very act of giving. When we give generously, we become more generous.

## **B. In It We Find the Blessings of God (Malachi**

**3:10)**

Many Christians have it wrong. They say that if you give, then God will give more back to you. But that is not how it works. We do not give to God so that we can get something in return. The amazing thing is that when we give to God and to others, the blessings just seem to come back to us. Of course, there is no guarantee that if you tithe you will never lose your job or never have other bad things happen to you. Nevertheless, when we give

generously, the unmistakable blessings of God flow into our lives.

**Close by looking at Personal Goals and Commitment card bulletin insert. Have people take them home & pray their response what they will say on these cards. Have a time of silent meditation and prayer, inviting everyone to take a card home and complete it.**

(Source: Enough)