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Ways to think about Financial Giving

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Giving as a Life Pattern

A life pattern is the way a person structures his or her life. A pattern of life is built or drawn from the values that a person develops over time. These values come from many different sources: our family, our schooling, the church, etc...

A Christian life pattern does not happen just because an individual decides to become a Christian. Our old values have created habits and ways of thinking.

When a person becomes a follower of Jesus, the old or conflicting values have to be changed. This value system change takes a long time since some habits are deeply ingrained in us.

Certainly for all of us, one of the basic values that is confronted when we become followers of Christ concerns our view of giving. Very simply, most of the world treats giving as an annoyance, a luxury or something to be avoided as a sacrifice of life. Yet, when we come to the Bible we see something very different.

God himself, is a giver and he encourages us to give money, time and our whole lives over and over again.



Ten Good Reasons To Give

1.

An opportunity to experience joy. God is a giver. Any time we imitate God and do the works that He does, e.g. share our faith, forgive another person who has sinned against us, pray for a sick person, or give financially, we are tapping into the very life and being of God. People who hoard never have an opportunity to experience God's life. Only givers can experience the joy of God.

2.

An opportunity to show gratitude to God. God has blessed each one of us with a variety of blessings: material well-being, family, church, work, health, etc. How many other ways to we really have to say "thank you " to God other than to return to Him a portion of what He has given us? Simply stated, giving is an opportunity for us to say to God, "Thank you!".

3.

An opportunity to participate in all the ministries of a large church. Churches are involved in a wide number of ministries that no one person could, by themselves, do or invest time in. For example, St John's gives a substantial amount of money to help support our Mission Partners, both at home and abroad; and our growing concern for the poor and needy means that we are committed to use our financial resources in this area. No one of us could do all this alone but a person who gives here has an opportunity to participate in all the ministries of St John's.

JESUS



4.

An opportunity to support what we believe in.

One of the best ways for a person to support a cause that they believe in is to give money to that cause. Political organisations and various groups supporting certain rights, certainly understand the importance of financing. Of course, financial giving is not the only way to support something. Giving our time, praying for that cause and supporting it with encouragement are all other valid ways to support a cause; but giving financially is certainly one major way to support what we believe in.

5.

An opportunity to practically acknowledge our view of life. Either the money that we control is ours, which is a secular world view, or all of our money belongs to God. True, only a portion of our time and only some of our money will be specifically designated for God and for His church, but all the rest ought to be dedicated to Him, used according to His will, and devoted to things that honour Him.

6.

An opportunity to be free from financial anxiety. Many people are anxious about their financial futures because they haven't learned about the paradoxical nature of the Christian life. People who hold tightly to their money will be in bondage to financial concerns. People who open their hands freely in giving will experience emotional liberty in financial matters. Jesus was not a wealthy man, yet he was a man who had tremendous financial peace.

7.

An opportunity to pay for services that we and our families receive. It is an extraordinary thing that many of us receive services such as counselling, training for our children, teaching, and opportunities to participate in ministry and yet allow others to pay for the services we receive. Someone is picking up the bill for the lights, heat, staff salaries, maintenance, and materials that we all enjoy. If you are able to give financially, and almost everyone in St John's is able to give, and you are not, then someone is paying for you.



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8.

An opportunity to receive financial blessing from God. God challenges us to put Him to the test. He says in Malachi 3, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this, says the Lord God Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." In many ways, I am hesitant to call attention to this great and awesome promise of God for financial blessing, yet the truth of my own experience is this: I have never met a tither whom God has not provided for financially. This promise from the book of Malachi is one of those promises that God is very quick to fulfil. Tithing does produce financial blessing from God!

9.

An opportunity to store up treasure in heaven.

God takes note of everything we do in secret for Him such as our secret prayer, our secret fasting, or our secret giving (Mt. 6). Whether there is a huge payoff here on earth (the book of Malachi tells us there is an earthly payoff) there will certainly be a heavenly payoff for those who give financially toward the work of God's kingdom.

10.

An opportunity to give beyond me and my own family. "Us four... no more", "God bless me... that's as far as I can see" is not what Christianity is about. If the only thing I pay for is my own home furnishings or my own family and my friends, then Jesus says I am no better than the Gentiles. Non – Christians give generously to their friends and family as well. Christian giving is different because it involves sowing beyond ourselves and our own circle.



Biblical Illustrations Regarding Giving

Three threads run through the tapestry of the Bible's message concerning Christian giving: *stewardship, first fruits and tithing.*

1. Stewardship - A steward is someone who manages or administers the property or affairs of someone else as an agent. The message of the Old and New Testaments is that human beings act as steward's of God for all creation. For the Christian, achievement is not measured by how much one makes or how much one has. The measure of a Christian is how well possessions have been used in Jesus' name and for what purpose.

2. First fruits - The idea of first fruits challenges most of our current thoughts about giving. Giving is typically based on what we no longer need or what is unused after we have paid all the bills. The concept of first fruits is entirely different. Back in the Old Testament a person was to give the first fruits of their crop. Those first vegetables of early summer always seem to be the best. We have waited for them and nurtured them during the slow warming of the spring. The Bible continually calls us to give the first of everything to God (Prov. 3:9). God expects people to give from the very best they have. It means the money we give the church comes out of the income first before obligations or savings are even considered.

3. Tithing - In an affluent society, we need some guidance for our thinking about giving. In Old Testament times the tithe was the king's portion. After a king conquered and subjugated the people, the people would render to him a tithe (a tenth of the produce of their land). Because Israel was conquered by God's love and care, Israel became obligated to render to the Lord a tithe. Tithes were used for several purposes: the maintenance and support for the priesthood (Num. 18:21-24); tithes were paid to the poor (Deut. 14:28-29); and a sacred tithe was given that would be associated with a fellowship meal (Deut. 14:22-27). In fact, when you calculate the Old Testament tithe requirements, the **three tithes add up to about 28% of a person's income.** This was on top of taxes imposed by the government and for the temple. But the basic rule was that **"a tithe of everything... belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord"**(Lev. 27:30-33)

Is Tithing Legalistic?

Tithing existed before the law was given (see Gen. 14:18-21 regarding Abraham and Melchizedek) and the Christian church has historically followed the pattern of Abraham in recommending that at least a tithe to our King of Righteousness and Peace.

Moreover, since our righteousness "is to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mt. 5:20), **Spirit-led church members will be led to give at least as much as the Pharisees.** Remember this: it is not legalism to do what is difficult or a bit unnatural at first. It may be "natural" for a boyfriend and girlfriend to sleep together. But the Holy Spirit will lead them to a less "natural" but more holy way of relating.

Similarly, financial giving may not be easy - but it is certainly what God intends. Tithing today is not a legalistic edict (that is, a wooden command without the heart attitude of giving). We in St John's believe, however, that tithing is a wonderful place to start a life pattern of giving in an affluent society.

Should our giving go to the local church?

We want to encourage people to think through the New Testament message regarding the local church. Even within a wider denomination it is the local church that is chiefly designed by God to be the agent of the kingdom of God in this world. The local church crosses generational lines, ministering not only to children and youth, but to grandparents, babies, singles and marrieds. The local church carries on all of the functions of kingdom living including the worship of God, the teaching of God's Word, ministry to the poor, prayer for the sick, the burial of deceased loved ones, world missions, etc. The local church is entrusted with the two biblical ordinances: Baptism and the Communion.

In sum, **the local church is the chief focal point of God's plan for the ages (Eph. 3) and ought to be your focal point for giving.** St John's, in no way, discourages people from giving to para-church organisations, to friends on the mission field, or to individuals carrying on evangelistic work. In fact, many leaders in St John's give substantially to para-church organisations and to leaders outside the local church. But we would very much hope that such giving be above and beyond our substantial financial commitment to the local church, since the local church is God's chief agent for bringing the kingdom of God into this world. The fact that our contribution to the central funds of the Church of England in this area is very large (currently the second largest in the diocese), and goes in part to help other local church ministries, is another reason for giving primarily to the local church.



We do not want anyone to give out of a grudging or legalistic spirit. We believe all giving ought to be voluntary, joyful, and be seen as an opportunity and not a duty. In order to fulfil the biblical pattern and to express our commitment to God and our commitment to support what He is doing here, we ask members of the church to make a commitment to regular financial giving each month. We also encourage leaders to tithe to St John's (unless it is financially impossible).

Where we stand at St John's

