

## **Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Giving (But Were Afraid To Ask)**

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Sane Money: Sane Living in an Insane World Series

Malachi 3:6-12

I want to begin by telling the stories of a few remarkable people – a few were famous and wealthy – the others you have never heard of. They have ordinary incomes. Some own six Mercedes and others don't own a car. What makes this group of folks that I want to talk to you about is the extent of their giving.

There is a man named Albert Lexie. You've never heard of Albert. He is a 63-year old shoe shiner in Pittsburgh. In 1981 he watched a telethon for the children's hospital in Pittsburgh and he scraped together a \$730 donation to give to the children's hospital. The last two decades, he's given over \$90,000 to the children's hospital in Pittsburgh. He saves it from the tips he makes polishing shoes. Albert lives on just \$10,000 a year. He recently emailed President Bush and asked the President whether he could shine his shoes. Albert said: "I'll bet the President would give me a \$100 tip. Then I would have even more to give to the kids at the children's hospital."

I'll bet you've never heard about Anthony Parks either. Anthony's mom got pregnant with Anthony when she was 15. She lived in an inner-city neighborhood in Oakland. She was forced to drop out of high school and didn't get her GED until years later. As a teenager, she was forced to raise 2 boys on her own. She became a beautician and she decided that she would make more money if she got up really early in the morning to do women's hair before they went to work and if she worked in the evenings, when women got off work. Her days would often not end until 11:00 p.m. at night but she scraped together enough money to send her boys to a private Catholic school because she wanted a brighter future for her children.

Anthony was an incredibly hard worker. He lied on an application to McDonald's when he was 15 and got himself a job. By age 19 he was making \$20,000 a year. He became a waiter and was such a fabulous waiter that he caught the eye of Steve Wiezbowski, who ran several big restaurants in San Francisco. Mr. Wiezbowski asked Anthony to become an assistant manager at his biggest restaurant. Within six months Anthony was promoted to manager. Mr. Wiezbowski coached him in management and in how to run a business. He made him master excel spreadsheets and learn the jargon. If he didn't learn the jargon, he told him to get some textbooks that would teach him the jargon.

A decade later, a recruiter came from a dot.com company and asked Anthony Parks if he wanted to get involved in this little start up internet business. The

company's founder was Louis Borders, the same guy who started Border's Bookstore. Anthony went to work at this little dot.com company in 1996. The company went public in the year 2000. And Anthony, this guy who had been working his tail off for 25 years, just like his mom did, to put bread on the table, suddenly became a multi-millionaire.

What did Anthony do with his new-found wealth? He went to an investment advisor at Morgan Stanley out in San Francisco. One of the standard questions that this investment advisor asked his clients was: "Do you want to make a gift of any of the shares of stock that you've got?" Anthony leaned across the desk and whispered "yes" as if he were telling the deepest secret of his soul. He pulled out a list of six folks that he wanted to give stock to.

A few days later, the investment broker got another list. This list went on for three pages. It had more than 60 names. Some of the people on the list were given \$1000 worth of stock. Other people were given hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stock – folks like his mom, the Catholic school he attended, the businessman who had helped him get a step up. Anthony even found his dad, who had never given him anything in life, and he gave him a gift of stock.

Ordinary people; extraordinary giving.

Some of you may have heard recently the story of Michael Redd, the great basketball player from OSU who is now a Milwaukee Buck All-star. Michael's dad, James, was a stand-out basketball player at West High School, where Michael also attended school. James was recruited by Bobby Knight, Digger Phelps, and Dick Vitale ("Awesome Baby!"). But James' mom was ill at the time, and so he decided to stay home and attend Capital University. He met his wife there. He taught Michael how to play basketball by putting a pink trash can in the hallway and having him throw wiffle balls into it when Michael was just two.

Well, Michael grew up to be an NBA All-Star. Not only has he bought his parents a house, but because his dad, James, is a pastor, he just bought his dad a church building. Along with all of Michael's other charitable giving, he just gave several million dollars to build a beautiful 500-person church on the Eastside of Columbus.

Extraordinary givers...

Who gives? Let me give you a few stats and a few principles that I've discovered over the last two decades of pastoring. According to the IRS and Gallup surveys 31% of Americans given nothing to charity over the course of a year.

Do you know what the best predictors of giving are?

Volunteers Give

The more someone volunteers at a church or for a charity or non-profit, the more they give. In other words, givers are people who tend to be generous not only with a check, but also with their time.

#### Active Christians Give

One of the clearest findings of all the research on giving and volunteering is that the volunteer donor is likely to be an active Christian. This is a better predictor than income, age, race, or education.

#### Regular Church Goers Give

About a third of Americans attend religious services every week. They give two-thirds of all charitable contributions in the nation. And they just don't give to their churches. Two-thirds of all contributions for non-religious charitable enterprises come from regular church attenders.

#### Biblical Christians Give

The research is also clear; those who say that their primary duty is to help others commit their lives to Christ give more than anybody else in America. As a general rule, the more biblically committed a person is, the higher their giving is.

Let me share with you a few personal observations about who gives:

People who give the most complain the least in church.

There is a myth that says that when someone gives a lot to a church they are going to be the most demanding. But in all my years of pastoring, I have found exactly the opposite. There is an inverse relationship between complaining about something in church and giving. The reality is, in all my years of pastoring, there is a general rule that folks who give the least complain the most. Folks who are serving, generous with their time and giving, complain the least.

The second thing I've discovered about people, at least here at the Vineyard is:

Most people want to give.

I've talked with so many folks about how they are doing spiritually and about their giving. The majority of people say they want to give more than they are giving. They just need practical help. They feel strapped by too many bills. They feel like their finances are out of control. That is why I've been doing this series of talks on money. That's why we do financial counseling and Crown Financial groups. My experience is that if you are a follower of Jesus, you want to give.

The vast majority of followers of Jesus want to give more than they are currently giving.

So today I want to give you some really practical teaching from the Bible regarding giving and how you can fulfill what I believe is a God-given desire to become a more generous person. I've called today's talk, "Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About Giving (But Were Afraid To Ask)." Let's pray.

If you have even a passing acquaintance with the Bible, you know that you are supposed to give a portion of your income to God to promote God's work in the world. One of the ways the Bible talks about giving to the work of the Lord is that we are to give God our firstfruits. We read verses like Proverbs 3:9:

**Proverbs 3:9**

Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;

And in Exodus 23:16:

**Exodus 23:16**

Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field.

Why throughout the Old Testament did God tell the children of Israel to give him the firstfruits of their crops and their herds?

Why does God tell us to give him our firstfruits? Turn with me to Deuteronomy 26:1-11:

**Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us." The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing

with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.” Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household

In this text, the people are commanded to pause and reflect on their history with God. They are commanded not to just push ahead to the next item on their to-do list, the next mountain to conquer, and the next task to accomplish rather, they were to pause and reflect on their history with God and specifically to pause and reflect on two things. 1) God’s great saving activity as he drew them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm – to pause and reflect on their salvation, and 2) to pause and reflect on their current blessing. That all that they have had come about by the generosity of God, verses 9-10:

**Deuteronomy 26:9-10**

He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.” Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him.

I love that phrase from verse 10:

**Deuteronomy 26:10**

and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.

In other words, I give you nothing that you haven’t first given me, O Lord. Why do we give firstfruits to God? Because we are giving God our thanks. This is the ultimate motive of all financial giving and for all volunteering for the work of God. It is not obligation. This is not a bill given to you by God. God is not invoicing you. The reason we are to give financially to the work of God and to serve is out of a heart of gratitude.

There is an old saying that all Christian theology is grace and all Christian living is gratitude. We have over on the right hand side of our room the banner that says: Worship is our response to God’s extravagant grace. We could say the same thing about giving. Giving is our response to God’s extravagant grace. It comes out of a heart of gratitude.

Let me ask you a question: Would you say that as a general rule you are a grateful person? Even more than that, would you say that you are really good at expressing gratitude to God and to others? Do you find yourself frequently saying “Thank-you God!”? Many of us are so busy pushing on to the next accomplishment and checking off the next thing to do on our to-do list, that we don’t pause to pick up a phone, write a note, and thank someone for cooking us a wonderful dinner, or for teaching our children in children’s ministry, or for

opening up their home week after week to host a small group. The reality is, brothers and sisters, that if you and I are too busy to pause and say thank you, we're too busy.

So once a year, the Israelites were commanded to pause and reflect on God's blessings, to not push ahead. Do you know that when you pause and reflect on your blessings you actually enjoy them more?

John Claypool, in his book *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, tells about the horror of losing his 10-year old daughter to leukemia. A couple of years after her death when he was able to look back from a little distance, he said, "At least it makes things bearable when I remember that Laura Lua was a gift, pure and simple, something I neither earned nor deserved, nor had a right to. And when I remember that the appropriate response to a gift, even when it is taken away, is gratitude, then I am better able to try and thank God that I was given her in the first place...the way of gratitude does not alleviate the pain, but it somehow puts some light around the darkness and build strength to begin to move on."

Donald McCullough in reflecting on John Claypool's remarks said this: "Here is the revolutionary truth revealed through the eyes of gratitude: Nothing has to be."

No good thing in your life has to be there by some sort of necessity. If you get a good night's sleep, that is a gift. If your body works without pain, that's a gift. If you get to spend another day with loved ones, it is a gift. If you wake up in the morning and you have a clear mind, you are sane, it is a gift. Your friends, your home, your work – it is all a gift. It is all on loan from God. So giving God your firstfruits is a way for you to say thank you to God for all that is in my life that didn't have to be.

Giving firstfruits is a way to give God your trust. Leviticus 23:9-11, 15-16:

**Leviticus 23:9-11, 15-16**

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. "From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.

We read in the book of Leviticus about two different Jewish festivals. The first is called The Festival of Firstfruits where the Israelites were commanded to bring a sheaf of barley to the sanctuary and give that to the priests there. The second festival was called The Feast of Weeks. We call it Pentecost. In the second

festival seven weeks after the Feast of Firstfruits, the Israelites are to give the firstfruits of their wheat harvest.

Just as a side note, if you are interested in bible study, the Festival of Firstfruits takes place on the day that we call Easter Sunday. It is the day after the Sabbath following the Passover. It is interesting that Christ is called the firstfruit of the resurrection by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. The Festival of Firstfruits in the Old Testament corresponds exactly to Easter Sunday in the New Testament.

But the interesting thing about this period of time between the Feast of Firstfruits and Pentecost Sunday is that these 50 days is the period of the most unpredictable weather over the course of the whole year in Israel. You simply cannot anticipate whether the days are going to be wet or dry, cold or hot, windy or calm. So the Israelites never knew once they offered the firstfruit whether there was going to be a good harvest or not. Yet, they were commanded to give their firstfruits.

What is God asking for? He is saying, "I want you to trust me with your future."

We say, "God, it is really hard for me to be a generous giver to your work because my future is so uncertain. The economy is crazy. I have bills coming in."

God commands the Israelites to give the firstfruits at the most uncertain time of year, not when everything is lined up. Not when all your investments are secure and your bank account is full. He says: Give me the firstfruits at the time of greatest risk, when it requires you to trust me for my provision that I can touch all the bases in your life.

Why the firstfruits? Because obviously, they're first. God says that he wants you to give him your first. We've spent the last few weeks talking about two issues that control the way we Americans handle money. The way the world teaches us to handle our money is this:

1. We earn our money
2. We enjoy it. Usually, we over-enjoy it, which lands us in debt.
3. We repay our debt from overspending.
4. We save for future needs once we're out of debt.
5. We give, if and when there is anything left over.

After we've enjoyed our money, paid off our debt, saved for our retirement, then if we have anything left over after our contributions to our 401K and all the other deductions from our account, then we give the excess that is left to God.

The principle of firstfruits tells us to invert the last four items. Here is the way that God teaches us to manage our money:

### God's Way of Managing Money

1. We earn our money.
2. We give generously to the work of the Lord.
3. We save for future needs.
4. We repay our debts.
5. We enjoy what is left over.

When you reverse the order and follow God's plan for your money, the result is more of a sense of fulfillment, more peace in your life, more of a sense that your life is working the way God designed it to work. I can tell you something. There is a very easy way to know whether your financial habits are following the way the world teaches you to spend, or whether you've learned God's way and you've learned how to reprioritize your spending. The easiest way to find out if you understand the firstfruits principle of giving to God first is to look at what happens when you face a financial crunch.

If you are simply giving to God what is left over, the last portion of your income, then when you are squeezed financially, your giving will absolutely shrink because you will not have very much left over. You spend all of your money on consumption and over-consumption and paying off bills from over consumption and you get squeezed economically, you are going to have very little to give to God.

The Biblical principle is to give God your first in everything and God will take care of the rest. Matthew 6:33:

#### **Matthew 6:33**

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Why do we give God our firstfruits? You are giving God your thanks. You are giving God your trust. You are giving God your first. Firstfruits communicates that you are giving to God your best. Firstfruits are not just first in time. They are first in quality. Exodus 23:19a:

#### **Exodus 23:19a**

Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.

The first strawberries that come up in your strawberry patch are always the sweetest. The first tomatoes that ripen on the vine are the ones you always enjoy the most. Your baby's first steps, their first words, are always the most memorable. Firstfruits tells us that we owe to God our very best. We give to God the best moments of our day, not just the leftover, the excess, after all your



tasks are done. You give God your very best moments for prayer, for giving thanks, and for worship.

You give God your best in service. Not just: "If I have just a little bit of time after I've taken care of everything else." You serve here in the church because you are giving God your best, not your excess.

The same is true of your money. Let me ask you a question: Would you say, as a general rule, that you really do try to give the Lord your best?

No one is perfect. No one rings the bell every day. But if you say that this is the aim of your life, this is your goal, to give God your very best, firstfruits giving is a reminder of giving God our best, even as God gave us his firstfruit, his very best. Christ is called the firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15. The Holy Spirit is the firstfruit. Christians are called the firstfruits. God gives us his very best and we don't return to him our discards.

How much should we give to the Lord? In Malachi 2, the people are making this accusation against the Lord. Malachi 2:17:

**Malachi 2:17**

You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"

The accusation is simply this: Lord, you are not keeping your end of the bargain. The people were living in a time of declining economy. There was financial abuse by the wealthy. They were living with a great deal of economic injustice. What they were essentially saying was: "God, we are doing everything you have commanded us to do. But you are not keeping your end of the bargain."

Have you ever said that to the Lord? "Lord, I'm doing everything you told me to do, God. But you are still not providing. You are still not answering my prayers." Have you ever wondered: God, are you a God who keep his promises? Does it make any sense to you, O Lord, if I obey or disobey? Sometimes we look around us and it seems there is no rhyme or reason to people's lives. I will serve you, God, but I get nothing. My brother or sister, who never goes to church, who lives a self-centered life, everything seems to go well for them. Their kids are always on the honor role. Have you ever felt this way? You pray and pray, but your finances are still a disaster. You still don't have a job, a husband, or a wife. Your marriage still isn't any better. You are still emotionally disconnected from your spouse. The drinking, fighting, or lack of connectedness goes on and on week after week, year after year.

You say to the Lord: "I still don't feel any better after prayer. My loved one is still not healed."

Have you ever wondered to yourself, does God keep his promises, like the children of Israel said in Malachi 2:17? Is God a God of justice? God has not blessed me, in other words, in the way that I think he should and in the way I think I deserve. The Lord answers. Here is his response in Malachi 3:6-7:

**Malachi 3:6-7**

“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

God’s response essentially boils down to: I owe you nothing! God says: I haven’t changed. It is you, my people, who have changed.

Or, even worse: It is you, my people, who haven’t changed and despite your protests to the contrary of faithfulness, you my people, are exactly the way that you and your forefathers have always been – half-hearted in your obedience, giving me your leftovers, your excess and your discards.

God accuses the people of being sinful and self-righteous and needing to repent.

Do you know a very reliable sign that your relationship with God has gone way off the track is when you begin to believe that God owes you something. I’ve done such and such, just as your word, God, tells me to do. I obeyed you by not having sex with my boyfriend or girlfriend. I obeyed you by getting up in the morning and praying. I’ve done such and such, Lord, now pay up!

What a dangerous place to be in spiritually. Brothers and sisters, God’s blessings are not wages that he pays to us because of a job that is done well. We owe God our whole lives. He is our Creator. The Lord is our Savior. We can never put God in our debt as if we are his creditors and he is our debtor. The Lord never owes you or me anything. He does not owe you or me a healing. The Lord does not owe you or me a job. The Lord does not owe you a blessing on your business. The Lord does not owe you or me a mate. He does not owe you a certain kind of marriage. He does not even owe us another moment of life.

As the apostle Paul put it in Romans 11:35:

**Romans 11:35**

Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?

Or as Jesus said in his parable of the unworthy servant in Luke 17:10:

**Luke 17:10**

So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'

We commit the awful sin of self-righteousness and pride when we allow ourselves to believe that somehow, in some way, God owes us a blessing on our business, on our marriage, on our health, on our finances, family. Or even worse, when we make the choice to become bitter and angry with the Lord because he didn't pay us what we believe he owes us.

Are any of you in that spiritual condition today? Do you believe that you have been ripped off by God? I would like to ask all of you to repeat the words on the screen after me:

God owes me nothing! All that I have is because of God's grace.

You know, this faith that we call Christianity is not magic. We are not involved in Wicca as if we control the spiritual world by our incantations or our behaviors, our rituals. Every good thing in our life is the result of the free, utterly un-coerced gift of God. God has given us in his sovereign freedom health, work, relational blessings, and financial blessings. Always, always, always, it is sheer grace, the unmerited, unearned, un-coerced favor of God.

The fact is that we are not nearly as obedient as we claim. Those who believe that they've been ripped off by the Lord are most disobedient of all. The people here are called to repent, to return, to turn around and back to God. And specifically, how are they to turn around? Malachi 3:9-10:

**Malachi 3:9-10**

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD 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.

We claim that God is ripping us off. God says, "You are ripping *me* off!" God rebukes the people. The rebuke is this: You are robbing God. How are they robbing God? By skimping on their giving, God says, in tithes and offerings.

Now, the word tithe literally means the tenth part, or one-tenth. You cannot tithe 2% of your income. You cannot tithe a few bucks a week, if your income is more than \$20, 30, or 40 dollars. The call to tithe, to give one-tenth of one's income to God is mentioned 32 times in the Old Testament. We first read of the tithe, the tenth part, in Genesis 14. Before the institution of the old covenant, Abraham gives one-tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek, who was priest of the Most-High God. Abraham gives Melchizedek this tenth of the spoils in recognition that

Abraham's military victory was not achieved by his strength alone, but with God's power. Abraham is a man who recognizes that nothing had to be, and that he is utterly dependent on the Lord for all success.

The principle of tithing our wealth is drawn from ancient near-Eastern culture. Whenever a king conquered a land, he commanded the conquered people to give him a tenth of the land's produce, a tenth of all the animals, a tenth of everything that the people raised.

So, this ancient near-Eastern principle was drawn into the Old Testament by God. When the Lord became the King of Israel by purchasing the Israelites out from slavery by buying this slave nation and by entering a covenant with them and giving them the land of Israel, the Lord commanded that Israel give to him as their king the tithe that is owed the conquering king.

Actually, there was a three tithe system in Israel. The first tithe involved one-tenth of all the yearly produce and all the flocks and cattle. This tithe was used to support the Levites and priests. If you are taking notes, that is in Leviticus 7:30-34.

The second tithe was known as the festival tithe, which was a tithe of the nine-tenths of the people's income that was less. This tithe was to be set apart and be taken to Jerusalem. If it was impossible to make the trip with produce and animals, a tenth of their possessions could be sold and the money was used to make a trip and to purchase food and animals for offering in Jerusalem. We see this in Deuteronomy 12:5-7.

The third tithe is often identified as a charity tithe. It was given during the third year. It was designated for the Levites, the strangers, the fatherless, and all who were widowed.

#### **Deuteronomy 14:28-29**

At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

The bottom line is that the nation of Israel at different times may have been commanded to give nearly 30% of their income to God. God tells the people of Israel in the book of Malachi to give him their whole tithe. I want you to see this in Malachi 3:10:

#### **Malachi 3:10**

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD 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.

When they gave him less than a whole tithe, when they gave him 2%, 5%, or 7%, they were robbing him. Wow! You talk about turning the people's accusation on its head. The people were saying: God, you are holding back from us. God says: No! It is you who have held back on me. It is you who haven't kept your end of the covenant bargain. I saved you. I gave you blessing. You are mine and as king a tenth of everything belongs to me. And you've been holding back. You give me whatever is in your wallet, your leftovers after you pay your bills, after you buy everything you think you need. I want a whole tithe.

Listen, some people say that the storehouse equals the church and they teach storehouse tithing. I think it is a little bit of an interpretative stretch to call the local church the storehouse of heaven. The reason why I believe the local church is to be given the whole tithe and offerings above that to other Christian organizations, to the poor, to people in your home group who have a need, is because the whole New Testament teaches that the local church is the fundamental agent of the Kingdom of God in this world. The center of God's plan in reaching the world is the local church and the local church ought to be the very center of your giving. But beyond that, we give offerings. Let me read to you a note that I received from a dear woman in our congregation just yesterday:

*Hi Rich!*

*We got a catalog in the mail this week that is definitely worth looking at. It is from Samaritan's Purse. In the catalog are many ways we can help those in need in Africa and Asia. There are things like buying a mosquito net for \$10 to protect children from the bites of infected mosquitoes. For \$75, you can buy a wheelchair for a child who needs one. \$45 provides tools, training, and supplies for a farmer to feed his family. The contributions range from \$4 to provide a child with milk for a week to \$25,000 (or any portion thereof) to build a church for Sudanese Christians.*

*My husband and I were so touched by the needs shown in this catalog that we have decided to give each of our children and their spouses, our mothers, (and each other) a small gift this year. The rest of the money we would have spent on them will go toward donating money to some of these causes. We will choose a different one for each family member to make it especially from them. We will then give each family member a card specifying what we gave in their name. We will not forget Mission Merry Christmas in our plans either.*

*The Samaritan's Purse Christmas gift catalog is worthy of your perusal! Thanks for bringing us the "straight talk" from God every week. We appreciate you and pray for God's manifold blessings for you, Marlene, and your children and grandchildren.*

Now, many people ask, "Does the tithe that we read so much about in the Old Testament apply to Christians under the New Covenant that God has made with us through his Son Jesus Christ?" Much of the church throughout Christian history has said that Christians were obligated to tithe even as the Jews were obligated in the old covenant. The Eastern Orthodox very early on required their members to tithe. The early church's expectation that every Christian would tithe found formal expression in the Synod of Macon in 585AD, which embedded the practice of tithing in Canon Law. In the 1500's the Catholic Church said that any Catholic that did not tithe would be excommunicated. Many Baptists and Pentecostals continue to teach the tithing principle today.

Here at Vineyard Columbus we say to our leaders that you cannot be a leader in our church, you cannot be a small group leader, you cannot be a women's group leader, you cannot be a children's ministry worker, you cannot be on our worship team, you can't be on our staff unless you tithe to the local church. It is one of our leadership requirements.

But if you say, "I believe that under the new covenant, we ought to give as the Spirit of God leads," I have no difficulty with that. I think that that is a legitimate interpretation of scripture. My question would be, "How will the Holy Spirit lead you?"

Let me put it this way: Let's say you hired someone to clean your house for \$15 an hour. Let's say in addition to cleaning your house, the person at the end of the day said, "I not only cleaned your house, but I also mowed your grass, I ironed all your clothes, and I made you dinner."

You say, "Wow! I wasn't expecting all of that. What do you want for all that you did today?"

The person said: Just give me whatever you feel led to give.

Would you give less than the \$15 that you originally agreed to?

As new covenant believers, God has given us so much more than what he gave to the children of Israel in the old covenant. We have his Son, his Son's life, his teaching, a record of his Son's miracles in the New Testament. We have the death of the Son of God. We have his resurrection. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have the assurance of eternal life. We have the blessing of the Christian church.

If you say, "I'm going to give as the Spirit leads," will the Holy Spirit lead you to give less than what the Jews were required to give under the old covenant?

Now, God is so kind that as an act of sheer grace, not because he owes us, not because giving coerces something from the hand of God, but simply because of sheer grace, God makes three promises to those who are generous regarding his work.

First of all, he makes a promise of blessing. Malachi 3:10:

**Malachi 3:10**

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD 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.

Now, let me stop here and say, "Does this mean do we give to get?" Tragically, some churches teach that: "We give to get. You give your tithe to God, you get a Mercedes and we'll share with you a testimony about it. You give to God your tithe, and God will triple your income. You want a promotion, you want a 3000-4000 square foot house, and here is the secret: tithe and God will prosper you financially."

Some pastors teach this. I don't.

There are two reasons why I don't teach this: First of all, I don't see anywhere in Scripture the principle of giving to hoard (i.e. you give to God and he gives back to you, and you get to spend all the financial blessing on yourself.) You give to God and when your income triples you get to buy a Mercedes, you get to have the big house. The principle I see in Scripture is not give to get, but give to get, to give even more. If God blesses you, then you give even more. It is not give to hoard. It is give, to get, to give.

The second reason why I don't teach the give to get principle is that I believe the blessing that God gives in Malachi 3:10 and the blessing promised by Jesus in Luke 6:38:

**Malachi 3:10**

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD 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.

**Luke 6:38**

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

There is often a blessing of a different kind than what we give. We sow with one kind of seed, and we reap another. You give money, but that doesn't mean you reap money. You may reap relational peace in your home, favor on your relationships at work, or the salvation of a loved one, or some special intimacy with God. Indeed, brothers and sisters, if you were wise, you will not dictate to God the kind of blessing that you must get as a result of your generosity. God is able to bless you beyond all that you ask or think or imagine. There is the promise of blessing.

There is a promise of protection. Malachi 3:11:

**Malachi 3:11**

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty.

When everything seems to be under stress in your life, when areas of your life seem to be under attack, it is the wise person who stops and asks: Lord, are you trying to get my attention? Everyone in the house is sick, the furnace goes out, you get in a fender bender, a bill you didn't know you owed comes due, there are four people really upset with you – it is the wise person who stops and says: Lord, is there something that you want to speak to me about? Is there an attitude, or behavior that you want me to repent of? Have I been omitting some responsibility that you want me to take care of? Are you trying to get my attention?

Maybe God would have you up your giving. Certainly, God would have you fulfill your pledge for our recent Giving Campaign, a pledge that you made to give to the Community Center and world missions.

When things are falling apart, it is the wise person who says: Lord, am I experiencing your fatherly discipline? Lord, is my family experiencing your fatherly discipline for one reason or other?

We read in Malachi 3:11:

**Malachi 3:11**

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty.

If you obey me in your giving, I will add protection to your life, says the Lord.

Third, not only do we have the promise of blessing, a promise of protection, but there is also a promise of witness. Malachi 3:12:

**Malachi 3:12**



“Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

God is saying, “Church, if you give, if you really bring the whole tithe, if you give not just your excess and whatever is leftover, but you make a plan to give, and you stretch yourself in a disciplined way, not just as emotion leads, but in a disciplined and obedient way to financially give to the work of the Lord, the promise I gave to Abraham 4000 years ago will be fulfilled. Nations around the world will say, ‘Thank God that those people in the Vineyard were faithful to God so that he could be faithful to them and bless them with resources to bless us.’”

You know, it is our desire as a church to be a blessing. To bless those who are less fortunate in our midst – that is why we are doing Mission Merry Christmas. I encourage you to give generously to Mission Merry Christmas. That is your gift to folks in the church who can’t afford Christmas presents for their families. It is our desire to be a blessing to our community – that is why we started up our free legal clinic. That is why we have our FOTV food pantry and free medical clinic. That is why we are building a community center and are increasingly involved with Columbus Public Schools.

It is this church’s desire to be a blessing around the world. That is why we did our capital campaign to raise money to send missionary teams out around the world to plant churches, to do economic development work, to build community centers in other parts of the world.

Some people say: I’m not giving, or I’m not giving sacrificially because no one asked me. You heard God’s Word today. The Spirit of God through the scriptures is asking you to give. Give generously. Give sacrificially. Give your firstfruits. Give the whole tithe. Let’s pray.

# Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Giving (But Were Afraid To Ask)

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Rich Nathan

November 19-20, 2005

Sane Money: Sane Living in an Insane World Series

Malachi 3:6-12

## I. Who Gives?

## II. What Should You Give To God?

- A. Give God Your Thanks (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)
- B. Give God Your Trust (Leviticus 23:9-11)
- C. Give God Your First (Matthew 6:33)
- D. Give God Your Best (Exodus 23:19)

## III. How Much Should You Give To God?

- A. The Accusation: You Are Not Keeping Your End Of The Bargain (Malachi 2:17)
- B. The Response: I Owe You Nothing (Malachi 3:6,7)
- C. The Rebuke: You Are Robbing God (Malachi 3:8-10)
- D. The Promises:
  - 1. A Promise Of Blessing (Malachi 3:10)
  - 2. A Promise Of Protection (Malachi 3:11)
  - 3. A Promise Of Witness (Malachi 3:12)