

The Grace of Giving

II Corinthians 8:1-5

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Welcome to week #3 of our 4 part series on generosity. We are studying generosity as a church, together so that we will be more like the people God wants us to be; so that we can grow into being the church Jesus hopes we will become; so that we can take on part of the character of God. “For God so loved the world he gave ...” John 3:16, so that we, together can strength the Kingdom of God on earth.

In our first week we considered the widow who placed her offering in the temple. She gave two small copper coins. It was all she had. Jesus said so. He said,

The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they will never miss; she gave extravagantly, what she could not afford – she gave her all.

Mk. 12:43-44 MSG.

Why was she so generous? Why did she give as she did?

She gave because:

1. She knew God.
2. She loved God.
3. She was grateful to God.
4. She had confidence in God. God had provided for her in the past and would do so in the future.

As a Jew she had learned of God’s provision for the Israelites throughout their rich history.

In week number one, I asked that those of you who do not give regularly would become an intentional/consistent giver. I asked that you would start at \$5.00 every week that you are here and even when you are not here. You can give on line, you

can text give or you can give through the Sunday offering. Giving intentionally, regularly might be your next step.

Last week we referenced the Old Testament prophet, Malachi. Because he was a prophet, he was a spokesperson for God. Because he was a prophet, his words were and are received as God's word.

In his book of the Bible, Malachi, speaking for God, addressed four main complaints against Israel.

1. Corrupt priests. Those who were chosen to lead the people in their faith development helping the people to draw closer to God had, in fact, drifted far from God. They became selfish and self-centered.

2. Mixed marriages. Jews that were taught to believe in the only God of the universe and were taught to love him above all else were marrying pagans who believed in many gods. This offended God. It created stress and tension, in their marriages, it compromised their devotion to God and drastically weakened their faith, sometimes leading them away from their faith.

3. Failure to observe the Sabbath. Sabbath observance was and still is essential to maintaining our relationship to God. When Sabbath failure occurs, people drift from God, God becomes less important in their lives and the Sabbath becomes just another day to do other stuff. The Sabbath was made for man, not made for the Sabbath. We benefit when we honor the Sabbath.

4. Ignoring the tithe. The Israelites were commanded to give 1/10 of their income, their crops, their livestock, their wealth to the Temple. It was not an option, it was a decree. It was essential so that the temple priests and their families would have food on their tables, so that the ministries of the Temple could occur and so that the Temple structure could be maintained, all as a way to honor God.

The Israelites thought God had abandoned them, had turned his back on them. But they brought this feeling upon themselves by marrying outside their faith, and compromising their beliefs, by failing to observe the Sabbath. Add to that the corrupt priests and the people began to lose confidence in God.

In Chapter 3 of Malachi's prophecy, we hear God confront his chosen people. Here we see in play what I believe is one of God's finest attributes. God's

unrelenting love God loves us. God loves his children so much that he always, always seeks reconciliation and restoration of his relationship to them. He says, “Return to me and I will return to you!” Another way to say this is “You are the ones who drifted from me. I have always been here.”

Rev. Harold Greenway, often said, “If you feel like you are far away from God, God didn’t move!”

God says in Malachi that they are robbing God by failing to be generous, by not giving their tithes and offerings. Remember, a tithe is 1/10 of your income, your resources.

Tithing is intended to teach or remind us that all things come from God. It is intended to teach us to be grateful to God for all God has done for us and all he has given to us. Tithing is an act of giving thanks. When the people failed to give their tithe, they were forgetting God’s gracious provision. They were taking God for granted.

The relationship God had with the children of Israel was more basic and instructional. God works to maintain his relationship with his chosen people. When Malachi speaks, he mentions four directives God gave his people that they had violated. Failure to observe the Sabbath; marriage to pagans; failure to give the tithe and corrupt priests serving in the Temple.

Since these four directives are given by God and the observance of them is expected, failure to do them was a sin against God. Sin is disobedience of God’s law and leads to separation, and distancing from God.

Through Malachi, God seeks to restore the relationship between him and his people, so God says, “Let me remind you as to who I am.” That is implied on my part actually.

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Malachi 3:10

The difference between Old Testament times and New Testament times is that they lived under the law, and we live under grace. They were required to tithe. It was a command. Because we live under grace we are not commanded to tithe.

If we are not required to tithe so then why are we being asked to consider tithing today? Taking away the command to tithe was never intended to encourage us to give less than the tithe. Rather to be under grace leads us to reflect on God's goodness, to question our purchases and evaluate our priorities again and again.

But some people want an answer to the question, "How much is enough?" How much am I required to give before I stop feeling like I am not giving enough? Pastors and church leaders quickly point to the tithe because it is out there, in the biblical literature. It is the only place that answers the question "how much?" with an amount, a percentage.

At Ingomar Church we believe tithing is a legitimate next step in the giving path of a follower of Jesus Christ. This week I made a list of responses to the question, Why should I tithe? By the way, my wife and I do tithe. That is how we calculate what we will give to the church and all of that goes to the church. We give extra, elsewhere. But our tithe goes to Ingomar Church.

So why should I tithe?

1. It answers the question, "How much should I give?"
2. It was commanded in the Old Testament, a sin not to do so.
3. As a devoted follower of Jesus who seeks to be a fully devoted follower of Christ, I should be at least willing to give that much.
4. I tithe because it helps me to prioritize my giving to God's kingdom above everything else.
5. Tithing reminds me that everything I have comes from God. He created it. He owns all of it.
6. I tithe because I love the Church. I love it so much. There is nothing else like it.
7. I tithe because I trust him to multiply and watch over our gifts.

8. I tithe because it breaks my heart to see the Church struggle financially, especially when we, you and me, have so much wealth.
9. I tithe because I am grateful for all I have – my live, my wife, our children, and 7 soon to be 8 grandchildern.
10. I tithe because I love God.
11. I tithe as an expression of my faith in God.
12. I tithe because I want to do so. It is a joy for me to give. Giving gives me pleasure.

In chapter eight of Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul applauds the generosity of the Macedonian churches. They were experiencing severe trial and extreme poverty yet they gave out of their overflowing joy in rich generosity. They did not allow their circumstances to prevent them from sharing in God’s work, from experiencing the joy of giving.

When you give, is it a joy for you to give? They urgently pleaded for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. I just love that. Do you consider it a privilege to give, to be a part of God’s work in the world?

Several years ago I led a study here at Ingomar Church called “Experiencing God: Knowing and doing the will of God.” It was a video series led by Dr. Henry Blackaby, a delightfully humble and genuine man of God Baptist pastor from Canada.

I remember a story he told about an elderly woman in his church who entered his office one day and wanted to give a sum of money to the church as part of a campaign.

Dr. Blackaby, knowing the woman’s financial situation, refused to accept the gift she offered. “Oh no - I could not take your money, you need it for yourself”, he said.

Then his voice cracked with emotion as he explained her response. “Oh pastor!” she said. “Would you deny me the privilege of serving my Lord in such a way?” He allowed her to give as she wished.

As I reviewed the teachings of Paul about giving mentioned in today's scripture but also in the writings of Paul and Peter in other places I discovered the following:

... for the Christian, giving is voluntary. It is an act of free will, a non-compulsory sharing of his or her material possessions with no stipulated amount, such as a tax or a tithe, demanded of him or her. The Christian gives as he has made up his mind to give and as God has prospered him or her. He or she gives because they are aware they are God's servant, that he nor his possessions are really his own to use as he likes that essentially she is a steward charged with the responsible handling of her master's goods; that eventually he must account for what he has done with these goods. The Christian gives because she has the generosity of Christ as her model, and the impelling power of God's spirit with him as his motivation.

Christians give cheerfully, voluntarily, systematically and with open-ended generosity.

Christians give joyfully.

In week #1 I asked that if you are not giving to the church every week that you would Take a Step of Faith and give \$5.00 per week when you are here and in the weeks that you are not. You can give weekly or monthly, yes you can give on line, you can give automatically, you can text give. I encourage you to become an intentional giver.

Last week I encouraged those already giving regularly to give proportionally and become a growing giver. Take the next step to giving a percentage of your income. If you give \$5.00/week and you make \$50,000/year, you are giving 1/2 a percent. Perhaps you will step up to \$20.00 per week and give 2% of your income.

Today I would like those of you who are percentage givers to consider stepping up to tithing. Move up from whatever amount you give, to give 10% of your income every week, when you are here and when you are not.

I also invite you to be in prayer about this, this week. Will you pray for God to guide you? Ask God what he would have you do. If you are married, be sure to make the decision together. Be sure to come back next week for the final message in this series and our chance to respond.