

October 1, 2023

Generosity – part 4

“How Much Should We Give?”

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Leviticus 27:30-33

Intro:

Elite athletes are experts at efficiency. Their training isn't just about getting stronger or faster, it is about getting to that place of maximum efficiency between effort and gain. They strive to know exactly how much strength, push, speed, or movement is needed to produce the end result of excelling in their sport. A marathon runner, for instance, has to figure out exactly how fast they should run in order to maintain a pace that can be sustained for miles and miles. Someone else might be a faster runner over a shorter distance, but that same person would not be able to maintain the pace. On the other side, if the marathon runner doesn't push to a high pace they risk not performing at their best. The strongest person doesn't always win the boxing match. The pitcher with the fastest fast ball doesn't necessarily strike out the most batters. And for each athlete that balance of efficiency is different.

This morning we continue our series on generosity and giving, and we look at the very personal question of just how much should we give, or how generous should we be, and how do we train ourselves to be efficient in giving so what we give in generosity is a blessing to us, to the recipient, and ultimately to God.

This sermon series has been following a series of videos produced by the CBWC Foundation, and so let us again turn to Bob Webber to introduce this topic area and offer a few thoughts. It is [Video #4 on the Foundation website](#).

Right off the top, I want to acknowledge that this is a very personal topic in the series. How much a person should give is very different from person to person, and situation to situation. There simply is no “one size fits all” answer; nor should there be any effort to try and compare what one person gives with another.

Comparison and formulas are not helpful things in this conversation. They can erode the good that can come from generosity, and more importantly, they can seriously damage relationships if one person is perceived to be judged by another.

With that in mind, Scripture does still provide some framework for determining what we should be giving and so I would like to expand upon two key parts of what Scripture has to say in this area.

Tithes and Offerings:

The key concept for us to understand is the difference between a tithe and an offering.

Most of us have heard the term “tithe” before, and most of us who have any familiarity with church will know that often the tithe is viewed as the standard formula used to figure out how much a church might expect from an individual in their giving. Those aren’t wrong things to understand or be familiar with, but they also aren’t the whole picture, or maybe the most healthy way to view things.

First, we need to understand that the tithe, as the Old Testament teaches, was not intended to be a religiously-held-to exact amount. The word tithe means “a tenth”, and it was used as the means to determine how much a person was to bring to the temple, but it represented something more. When God separated out the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to form them into a new nation, He committed to being their God and to holding them as His chosen people. When God made that commitment, He did so with His whole being. He did not say, I will commit 10% of who I am and what I have to you, He promised all of himself, and that they would receive blessings from all of creation that He controls. The condition, or the commitment, for the Israelites to receive this was that they would equally commit 100% their lives to God. God showed His commitment through the provisions and blessings that He gave, but how could the people of Israel show their commitment? Certainly they couldn’t just give everything that they had received from God back to God. The point of God giving those things

was so that the people would be able to live and thrive and grow as a nation. So, they were told to give back just a portion. The portion required was of the best that the people produced, and it was taken from the abundance of what they had, not from what was left over after it had mostly been spent or cooked or used up in some way. So the tithe represented the commitment of the people to be completely surrendered to God and was shown by giving to Him first from the best of what they had, and then they would sort out how to live on and use what remained.

The passage from Leviticus that we read earlier is just one of many references in the Old Testament that gives instruction about the bringing of a tithe. This same passage also acknowledges that the tithe amount, and really all of what we have, already belongs to God and so withholding that is equal to stealing from God – as we saw last week in our reading from the prophet Malachi.

The beauty of giving from a tithing perspective is that it equals the playing field for giving... or to go with the athlete illustration from the begging of the sermon, provides a system to make giving efficient.

Let's for a moment assume that everyone is giving to the church. This is not a bad place to give to, and does follow the instruction to bring the tithe to the temple, but that is not the point here. Anyways, everyone is giving to the church. Now, we could at budget time take the anticipated giving income in the budget and divide it equally by the number of people in the church. After having done that we could announce at the beginning of the year that we expect each person to give \$1000.00 per month as their tithe. While this would certainly make it easier to manage the budget, it certainly doesn't create an even playing field for everyone. Some of us would find this amount to be a small drop in our financial bucket and barely notice that it was being given – which could lead very quickly and very easily to barely noticing the commitment to giving all of who we are to God and serving His kingdom. For others, that same amount if given would mean not paying the rent or mortgage and/or not being able to eat or have clothes to wear.

Working from a tithe, or a tenth, position makes it the same for everyone. It might seem that some are giving more than others, but in reality we are all giving the same percentage, and we are still being able to use the blessings God has given to us as He intended – for our food and shelter and necessities of living. The giving of a tithe acknowledges Him as God without running the risk of resenting Him as an unfair task-master.

So, the first principle for figuring out how much we should give is to take the income that you receive each pay period, and set aside 1/10 of that to give back to God before you do anything else, and then assign the remaining 90% to the budget needs you have.

Offering:

The tithe, if you want to view it this way, is the required minimum. Offerings, then are what you give above and beyond that. This is also a personal choice, and unlike the system of tithing, there is no prescribed percentage or amount. In the passage from 2 Corinthians that we read earlier, Paul is reminding the people there of the commitment they had made to raise support for the struggling church in Jerusalem. This “special offering” was above the tithe that they would have given to their own local ministry. Paul says that this was to be done freely and without pressure. The amount given was entirely up to the individual and how they felt led by the Spirit, and in accordance with their resources, to give. But regardless of the amount, they should give it with joy and cheerfulness.

How do we engage in giving beyond the tithe and move into the offering mindset? Some would suggest that the giving of an offering should cause us to be a little uncomfortable and stretched. What is meant by this is that in giving an offering, it should move us to also give up some comfort in our own lives. Perhaps that is giving up buying a Starbucks coffee everyday and instead only getting the coffee one day a week and then use the rest of that money to bless someone or some organization. I have heard of some people, who at the beginning of the year when they set up their annual budget agree upon an amount of money that they

set aside to be available for when an unexpected need in their community comes up and God gives them a heart to help that need.

Of course, offering is not only about money. We can be generous with our time or other resources as well. It might be that there really is no extra money to set aside as an offering, but you have time available to volunteer somewhere, or you have a tool or something that you can use to help others with by either doing the work yourself or lending that tool out. You will find that if you seek the Lord in prayer on this and ask Him, He will show you how you can be generous with the blessings and gifts He has given to you.

Conclusion:

Finally, don't allow your generosity to become stagnant. Be intentional with your planning – financially and physically, so that you don't get caught in the "set it and forget it" trap. This is one of the dangers of using things like pre-authorized payments for your giving. It becomes easy to forget about it because it is out of sight and therefore out of mind. Andy Stanley suggests that our giving should be progressive, or at the very least flexible to adjust to how our lives and situations change. If you get a raise at work, then the amount you give should reflect that. Perhaps as you move into a different stage of life, such as becoming an empty-nester, you find that while your income hasn't really gone up, your expenses have gone down significantly. Factor that into how you approach the offerings you want to give in that year. Or perhaps your income has decreased for some reason; don't feel bad if your giving needs to reflect that as well. The beauty of using a percentage, like the 10% tithe, is that it can always adjust to the circumstances you are in at the time.

When you give, and however you give, don't let those resources leave from you without first acknowledging the blessings that God has given to you that allow you to be able to be generous, and secondly praying that God will use those gifts to bless others and further His kingdom.

Let's pray.