

GIVING

why, what & how?



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Giving is a touchy subject.

One website introducing foreign visitors to British culture has a section called, "How to talk about money in England – don't."

The Bible is a lot more upfront in talking about money than we are. 11 of Jesus' 39 parables are about money. Money is mentioned in 1 in 7 verses in Luke's Gospel. And a huge amount of the teaching about money in the Bible is about how and why to give it away.

In this short book we'll deal with the subject of financial giving by asking 3 questions, and giving a few answers to each one. Those questions are:

Why should I give?

What should I give?

How should I give?

Why Should I Give?

It's important to get our motivations right. Here are a few reasons to give.

Give because God tells us to

God gives people all they need. To show He's the most important person in our lives, He asks us to give some of what He's given to us back to Him.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were told to give God the first load of crops which came in.¹ This was a way of thanking Him for providing yet again, as well as showing their trust that the rest of the harvest would follow.

God also told them to give Him a tenth (or "tithe") of all that they produced.² They needed to bring 10% of their produce and give it to the priests. Some of this was given to the poor, some went to the upkeep of the temple, some paid the priests, and the rest was burned as an offering to God. They weren't burning money though! It would have been grain and oil and wine and things like that.

There were lots of different tithes and offerings to bring. So much so that some people estimate that your average, devout Old Testament Jew would have given about 25% of his income to the Lord via the temple.

¹ Leviticus 23:9-14

² Deuteronomy 14:22

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets bring up the issue of tithing as a sign of where the people are with God. And it's pretty much always bad news.³ Just like with us today, what they did with their wallets said a lot about how they felt towards God.

When we get to the New Testament, the word 'tithe' disappears, except when Jesus criticises the Pharisees for being very meticulous about tithing their spice rack but not loving God or caring about people.⁴ However, giving and generosity are still big themes.

Jesus says things like, "When you give the needy, do it like this" and "don't do it like that."⁵ But notice how He always says, "When you give" not "If you give." He presumes that His followers will be giving away their money to others.

And that's exactly what the first Christians did. In Acts 2, the snapshot we get of church life is of believers sharing all things together, to the point of selling their possessions in order to be more generous.

Giving is so important that when thieves are told to stop stealing, the reason they're told to get an honest job is "so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."⁶

Generous giving is a command from God. We could stop at that, but there are other reasons to give too!

Give because God has been generous to us

When we understand what God has given us in Jesus, we will want to give all that we can to Him. Giving is primarily a matter of the heart, not just the chequebook. But our bank statements are a good statement of where our hearts are, since "when your treasure is, your heart will be also."⁷

The air we're breathing now is a gift from God, free of charge. He owes us nothing, and anything other than Hell is a bonus. But day after day He pours out His goodness on us in all kinds of ways. God is so generous.

He especially shows His generosity in Jesus, who is our model for giving, as Paul points out; "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich."⁸

³ e.g. Malachi 3:8-10

⁴ Luke 11:42

⁵ Matthew 6:2-3

⁶ Ephesians 4:28

⁷ Matthew 6:21

⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:9

Giving is a great test of whether we've been impacted deeply by who God is and what He's done for us in generously saving us. It acknowledges that everything we have ultimately belongs to Him anyway and giving it back is a way of saying thank you.

Give because money doesn't last or satisfy

"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income..."⁹ Despite what the adverts say, more stuff won't make you happier. Instead, Jesus said it is better to give than to receive.¹⁰

One reason we sometimes don't give is that we love money too much. Jesus said no-one can serve two masters; it's either money or God.¹¹ Paul warned us of the trap of wanting more money. Money isn't the root of all evil, but the *love* of money is a root of all *kinds* of evil.¹² It can be an idol for us – we look to it to save us and give us security. But like all fake gods, it will fail us and make us worse.

Mark Driscoll says, "if we love money, we use God and people. However, if we love God, we are free to use money to love God and people."¹³

One way to loosen the grip that money has over us and to use it the way it was intended is to gladly give it away. John Piper says that every time we give for Jesus' sake, we're saying, "I love the gospel more than a new CD... more than eating out... more than new carpet... more than a new car."¹⁴

Give because there are important things which need money

Most would agree that it's awful that some people live in poverty. And that if we have the resources to help someone in need, then we should.

The most terrible thing, however, is that there are millions of people who don't know about Jesus. One day both rich and poor will have to face God, and the only way they can be safe is through the gospel.

If we want to give our money to something important, what could be more important than spreading this gospel? Giving financially to

⁹ Ecclesiastes 5:10

¹⁰ Acts 20:35

¹¹ Matthew 6:24

¹² 1 Timothy 6:9-10

¹³ Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears, *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*, Crossway (2010), p375

¹⁴ John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/why-is-there-an-offering-taken-during-a-worship-service> (last accessed 7th Dec 2012)

gospel work is the most effective way of helping the most people from the worst situation.

That's one reason why the Bible says that full-time Bible teachers should be paid.¹⁵ The church is the means God uses to reach a dying world with the message of salvation. The church needs to be taught and led. And so we should financially free up certain people from normal work to allow them time to focus on teaching and leading.

There are really important things to do which need money. If our heart is where God's heart is, then we'll want to give all we can to these things.

What Should I Give?

This is a big one. Exactly how much money is an acceptable amount to give? Here are a few ways to answer that question.

It's between you and the Lord

There is no set amount. That's what's behind the tithing idea in the Old Testament. It's proportional to your income. If you have zero money coming in, God isn't expecting you to give anything. Jesus praised the poor woman who gave just one tiny coin, saying she gave more than everyone else since it was all she had.¹⁶

Even tithing isn't a command for New Testament believers. Lots of Christians find it a helpful place to start thinking about their giving (10% or thereabouts), but it's not a hard and fast rule. If we can afford to give more than 10%, then that's great too! Tithing was always meant to be a floor rather than a ceiling; a starting point rather than a limit.

We are all commanded to give if we can, and it's right that we be challenged on the issue from time to time, but the actual amount you give is between you and the Lord. That's why at Emmanuel only the treasurer knows who gives what. And that's only so they can fill in the right forms.

It's also why we don't pass the plate around but we have a box at the back and encourage people to give by standing order. While not a perfect system, it emphasises that the amount you give is a private thing between you and God, not a matter for others to judge you on.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:3-14; Luke 10:7-8

¹⁶ Luke 21:1-14

Give what you can gladly

God isn't asking us to put ourselves into crippling debt so we can give a bit more. We need to provide for our families. So we should give what we sensibly can. Work out a budget and make sure that you are giving within your means.

This is to make sure we give gladly. "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."¹⁷

There's a story of a minister who accidentally put a £50 note into the collection at church. He whispered frantically to his wife, "Get that plate back! I meant to put in £5 but I put in £50 instead!" To which she replied, "Don't worry dear, God will count it as £5."

Give sacrificially

Remember how much it cost Jesus to give to us. The cross is our benchmark for generosity. Our giving *should* impact our standard of living if it's going to be truly generous.¹⁸

It might mean that we choose not to buy certain things or go on expensive holidays. It might mean it takes longer to pay off the mortgage or we need to keep a closer eye on our finances in general. It will be worth it.¹⁹

How Should I Give?

If we're convinced that we should give and we've worked out how much we're able to give at the moment, there's still the issue of the manner in which we give, and the practicalities of it. Here are some guidelines.

Give humbly and quietly

Jesus says our right hand shouldn't know what our left hand is doing.²⁰ We're not doing it in a showy way with trumpets and a flashing neon sign saying, "I'm digging deep!" Try not to talk about specifics or compare figures with others. It's between you and God, so don't give for show, give for Him.

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 9:7

¹⁸ e.g. 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

¹⁹ Mark 10:29-30

²⁰ Matthew 6:1-4

Be spontaneously generous

Since giving is a matter of the heart, we should aim at becoming generous people, not just skin-flints who act generously once a month when the bank automatically makes the transfer! Respond to needs as they arise.

On a day to day level, this might mean buying something for someone who needs it, helping out someone in your Connect Group with their rent if they're struggling, letting someone use your car, having people round for dinner even if they won't invite you back, etc.

Be deliberately generous

Sinful as we are, we don't tend to drift towards generosity. We need to plan for it and put 'giving' in the budget.

The primary place we should be giving to is our local church. That's the community we belong to and which we gain from spiritually. As well as supporting our Bible teachers, funding evangelism and paying the bills, money is able to be allocated to others in need, in situations we might not know about otherwise. We should give widely, but especially to our church family.²¹ Emmanuel, for example, is almost entirely funded by the generosity of the congregation, and we praise God for that.

If there are other causes which are close to your heart, set aside money for that too. At Emmanuel we aim to give away a decent chunk of our money to other organisations which are close to *our* heart as a church.

Why not also have a pot set aside so that next time you need to be spontaneously generous, you've planned ahead for it!

It's a good idea to review your giving each year. The start of a new year is a great time to re-budget and adjust what you give to your circumstances. Maybe your income has gone up but your giving hasn't. Maybe your income has gone down and you can't afford as much anymore. Thinking about it each year with the aim of growing in the spiritual gift of generosity is really helpful for making sure our giving is a matter of the heart, not just a standing order we set up years ago and haven't thought about since!

²¹ Galatians 6:10

Putting Our Money Where Our Mouth Is

Hopefully we've seen that giving is an important part of our discipleship. We should give joyfully, faithfully, humbly and generously in response to all of God's kindness to us.

Perhaps some of things in this booklet have got you thinking about your giving. Make sure you act on it! Set time aside to plan your giving. Talk about it with your spouse, if you're married. Pray for more of a generous heart so that you follow through on your desire to give.

If you have any more questions about giving, speak to someone at church about it. Any of the Leadership Team or your Connect Group leader would love to chat about it further with you.

If you'd like to start giving to Emmanuel or adjust what you already do give, why not pick up one of our 'Giving' information leaflets from church. This contains more details about how to set up a standing order and how to claim gift aid so the government can make your donation go even further. You can also or speak to our Treasurer in complete confidence if you want more information.

It is such a joy to be able to invest our money in something that will last. It's our prayer that God would enrich us in every way so that in turn we'd be generous in every way.²²

Why don't you pray that for yourself right now?

²² 2 Corinthians 9:11