

New Life in Christ

Lesson 23: God's Guidelines for Giving

Key Verse: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:8

In our last lesson we learned three great principles regarding money and possessions:

- 1. God owns all things.*
- 2. All things come from God.*
- 3. We and all that we have belong to God.*

The Bible says that we are God's "stewards." A steward is one who manages the money or property belonging to another person. As God's stewards, we are accountable to Him for the way we manage what He entrusts to us. In this lesson we will learn how we can be good stewards, especially in the matter of giving. We will learn how we can use our money to make eternal friendships.

The Teaching of the Old Testament regarding Giving

When God brought His people out of slavery in Egypt and into Canaan, He gave them a rich and fertile land. Of all that they produced on this good land, God required that they give the first tenth to Him. This was called "*the tithe*." The word "*tithe*" means "*the tenth*."

The purpose of the tithe was to remind the people of God's ownership of all things and to teach them to put God first in their lives. God is exceedingly generous. He allowed them to keep nine-tenths of all that they produced, but the tithe, or first tenth, belonged to Him. The Bible says,

"All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord." Leviticus 27:30

In addition to their tithes, God's people gave free-will offerings. The tithes and offerings were given to the priests of God. This was the means by which they lived since they had no land of their own. God's people were told to bring their tithes and offerings when they came to worship God. God said,

"...they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you." Deuteronomy 16:16-17 (NKJV)

God was teaching His people to give. When they gave freely to God, God gave them abundant crops. The Bible says,

"Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty..." Proverbs 3:9-10

Were God's people in the Old Testament always faithful in giving their tithes and offerings to Him? No, they were not. God said,

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." Malachi 3:8

What happened when they robbed God? They came under God's chastening hand. God said,

"You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation." Malachi 3:9

When God's people repented of their disobedience and began once again to obey Him in the matter of tithes and offerings, God poured out His blessing upon them. God said,

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.'" Malachi 3:10 (NKJV)

The Teaching of the New Testament regarding Giving

The great principle in the Bible regarding giving is this: ***When we give to God, God gives to us.*** The Lord Jesus said,

"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom." Luke 6:38 (NKJV)

When God gives, He gives bountifully. He is very generous. In Jesus' time, people bought their grain in bulk. Many sellers would pour the grain into a measure without allowing the buyer to shake it down. Not so with the Lord. He gives *"good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over."*

Giving enables God to give to us. The more we give, the more God gives to us; the less we give, the less God gives to us. Jesus said,

"For with the same measure that you use it will be measured back to you." Luke 6:38b (NKJV)

Both the Old and the New Testaments lay down the same teaching: When we give to God, God gives to us. God is not poor; neither is He stingy. He loves to give to His children, but we must fulfil His condition—*"Give, and it will be given to you."*

God does not ask us to give to Him because He is in need of anything we have. He says,

"If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fulness." Psalm 50:12 (NKJV)

God tells us to give because He wants His children to be like Him. God is generous, and He wants us to be generous. Another reason why God asks us to give is that we might *"lay up treasure in heaven."* We cannot send our money to Heaven, but we can give it to win others to Christ. This is laying up treasure in Heaven.

Principles of Giving

God's Word gives us a number of principles regarding giving:

1- First, give yourself to God.

The first gift God wants from us is ourselves. The order is: First, give yourself to God, and then give a portion of that which God has given to you. The Christians in Macedonia did just this, and the Apostle Paul commended them for it. Paul wrote,

"...they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." 2 Corinthians 8:5 (NKJV)

2 - Give as God has prospered you.

In the Old Testament, God commanded His people to give the first tenth of all they earned to Him. In the New Testament, God has not laid down a law as to how much we are to give. Instead, God's Word says,

"each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income [as God has prospered him]..." 1 Corinthians 16:2 (NIV)

What percentage of our income should we give? We can take the tithe (ten percent) as a guide to the minimum we should give, but our giving could be much more than this. It depends on how thankful we are for the way God has blessed us and how strongly we desire to *"lay up treasure in heaven."*

The Christian businessman, R.G. LeTourneau, made a practice of giving ninety percent of his earnings to God. One day someone asked him, *"Mr. LeTourneau, is it true that you give ninety percent of your income to the Lord?"*

He replied, *"No, I don't give God anything. It all belongs to Him. I just keep back ten percent."*

3 - Give systematically.

Giving is an act of worship, and our giving must not be a *"hit or miss"* proposition. We are to give regularly and systematically *"on the first day of the week"* when we come to worship God. The Bible says,

"On the first day of every week each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..." 1 Corinthians 16:2 (NIV)

No one is excluded. Old and young, rich and poor—all must be involved in giving. The Bible says, *"EACH ONE OF YOU should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income."*

4 - Give cheerfully and liberally.

Whatever we give to the Lord, He wants us to give it out of a willing heart. God does not want us to give grudgingly. The Bible says,

"Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7

5 - Give wisely.

The Lord Jesus said that we were to be *"good and wise stewards."* Some Christians give liberally, but they are not wise in their giving. To give to a church or organization that is not faithfully preaching God's Word is not wise giving. We should be as careful in investing our Lord's money as we would be in investing in a business. We should invest it where it will bring the greatest spiritual returns.

How God Measures our Giving

You do not have to possess large sums of money to be a large giver in God's sight. God does not measure our giving by the size of our gifts. He measures our giving by how much we give out of what we have. God looks at how much sacrifice is involved in our giving. By God's way of measuring our giving, a poor person can give as much or more than a wealthy person.

Our giving should cost us something. On one occasion, the Lord Jesus stood at the temple watching as the people brought their gifts. Some were rich and gave much. Then a poor widow came by and put in two small copper coins. These coins were of little monetary value; yet in God's sight, this woman had given more than all who gave that day. Why? Because she had given all that she had, even her *"living."* Jesus said,

"I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the offering box than all the others. For they all gave out of their wealth. But she, out of her poverty, put in what she had to live on, everything she had."
Mark 12:43-44 (NET Bible)

To Whom should we Give?

In His Word, God tells us to whom we should give:

1 - We should give to our local church.

Most of our gifts normally should go to our local church provided that church is one where the Bible is faithfully taught and Christ is exalted. God has ordained that His church and His ministers be supported by the gifts of His people. The Bible says,

"In the same way the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel to receive their living by the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:14 (NET Bible)

2 - We should give to those who have helped us spiritually.

We are instructed in God's Word to share our money with those who have taught us the Word of God and helped us spiritually. The Bible says,

"Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." Galatians 6:6 (NKJV)

3 - We should give to those in need.

We are to give to those in need—especially needy Christians. This is one way by which we can show that we have the love of God in our heart. The Bible says,

"Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God dwell in him?" 1 John 3:17 (NKJV)

As a general rule, our giving to the needy should be done through the local church. All our giving should be done simply and without drawing any attention to ourselves. The Bible says,

"He who gives, let him do it with simplicity." Romans 12:8

4 - We should give to those who are taking the gospel to the lost.

Every Christian has a responsibility to get the gospel to the lost. God's command to us is, *"Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15) If we cannot go ourselves, we should count it a privilege to help support missionaries who are taking the gospel to those who have never heard of Christ.

Giving is Sowing

Giving is not throwing money away; it is sowing. When we sow seed, we are not throwing it away; we are planting it so that we may reap a harvest later. The size of our harvest will depend on how much we planted. This is true of our giving also. Writing to the church at Corinth concerning giving, Paul said,

"He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."
2 Corinthians 9:6

God wants to provide money for the support of His churches and money to send His servants to the unreached people of the world. How does He do this? He gives money to us that we may give to His work. He wants us to be able to give generously. The Bible says,

"And God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times, you will overflow in every good work." 2 Corinthians 9:8 (NET Bible)

The Lord Jesus Himself is our great example in the matter of giving. The Bible says,

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NKJV)

Making Eternal Friendships

Jesus often taught His disciples by means of **parables**. A parable is a short story that brings out one or more spiritual truths.

In Luke 16, the Lord Jesus told of a certain rich man who had a steward who managed his property for him. When the rich man received word that his steward was wasting his goods, he called his steward before him to give an account of his stewardship.

When the steward realized that he would soon be out of a job, he said to himself, *"What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they (the friends I am going to make) may receive me into their houses."*

This steward devised a plan to provide for his future. He decided to call his master's debtors to him and make generous settlements with them. In that way they would become indebted to him and become his "friends." Then, when he was out of a job, these "friends" would receive him into their houses and provide him with room and board.

The steward quickly began to carry out his plan. The Bible says,

"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'"

The steward did likewise with all who owed his master. What was he doing? He was providing for his future. He was making "friends" for the future time when he would be out of his job. The master of the steward commended his steward for his shrewdness even though it meant some loss of revenue to him. He recognized that the steward needed to provide some security for his future.

From this parable, the Lord would have us learn three very important principles:

1 - Life is a stewardship, not an ownership.

All that we have belongs to God. We do not own anything. We are simply God's stewards, managing what He has entrusted to us.

2 - One day we must give an account of our stewardship.

God has given us life, health, talents, abilities, money, and other things. One day we must give an account to Him of what we have done with that which He has entrusted to us. To hear Him say, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant,"* will be worth more than anything this world has to offer.

3 - The wisest and best use of money is using it to win others to Christ.

Jesus summed up the heart of the story with this statement,

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by [means of] unrighteous mammon [money], that when you fail [die], they [the friends you have made] may receive you into everlasting habitations." Luke 16:9 (NKJV)

What the Lord is saying here is that we are to use our money to make eternal friendships so that these friends we helped win to Christ may be there to welcome us when we enter Heaven.

The story is told of an old gentleman in England who was approaching his eightieth birthday. Not knowing what to give him, his children and relatives decided to pool their gifts and give him the money to buy whatever he wanted.

The relatives collected a sum of money equal to about \$2,400. When he was told of this, the old gentleman asked, *"Do you mean that you have collected this sum of money and I can do what I want to with it?"*

When they assured him that this was correct, he said, *"I want this money to pay for printing the Bible in a new language for a tribe of people who have never had God's Word in their own language."*

The relatives checked with the British and Foreign Bible Society. An official there said, *"This is amazing! Some missionaries in Africa have been working for years translating the Bible into a new language. We have just received the manuscript."*

When asked how much it would cost to have the Bibles printed in this new language, the official said, *"About three thousand dollars."* Quickly the relatives passed the hat around again and collected the additional money that was needed.

In time, the Bibles were printed and on their way to this tribe in Africa who had never had the Word of God in their language before. Many came to know Christ as Savior through reading God's precious Word. *(quoted by L.E. Maxwell)*

In our imagination, let us picture this old gentleman as he entered Heaven some years later. Already, many from that tribe in Africa had died and gone to Heaven. As he enters a group of people greet him and throw their arms around him. They say to him, *"You are our friend. We have been waiting for you."*

The old gentleman looks at them in surprise and says, *"But I don't know you. Who are you?"*

"You may not know us," they say, *"but we know you. You are the one who gave the money that made it possible for us to have God's Word in our own language. If it had not been for you, we would not be here in this beautiful place. You are our friend forever!"*

A day is coming when our money will be useless and meaningless. A day is coming when our stewardship will be over. In the little time we have left we should use our money to win others to Christ and thus make eternal friendships. This is the wisest and best use of money.

Each of us should ask ourselves these questions: Am I a good steward of all that God has entrusted to me? Am I using my money to make eternal friends? Will there be anyone to greet me in Heaven and say to me, *"If it had not been for you, I would not be in this beautiful place. You are my friend forever."*?

Discovered Gem: The wisest and best use of money is using it to win others to Christ.

Questions:

1. What is the great principle in the Bible regarding giving?
2. Explain how one of the five principles of giving is to give to yourself, first.
3. By what does God measure our giving?
4. Is the size of our gift really important in God's eyes?
5. Are we ever held accountable of our stewardship?
6. Should you tithe, even if you are struggling financially?
7. How is giving not throwing money away?
8. What is the wisest and best use of money?
9. Based on the parable of the rich man in Luke 16 we learn that life is what?
10. Are you a good steward of all that God has entrusted to you? Explain please