

10 for 10

TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 5

A new heart is God's precious gift to you **Lord, You I Love with All My Heart**

Last week's lead article discussed the practice of *proportional giving*. We were encouraged to carefully plan our giving so that we might give *in proportion to how God has blessed us*. Giving proportionately means *giving a fixed percentage of our incomes*. Experience teaches and statistics show that giving amounts are not directly tied to tax brackets and bottom lines. Scripture teaches that the level of giving is intimately connected to the depth of our faith in the promises of God. What we earn and how we manage God's blessings are factors in determining what we give, but our relationship with God is the decisive factor.

This week's article takes the final step from *firstfruits giving* to *proportionate giving* all the way to *sacrificial giving*. Sacrificial giving has been defined as "giving something we love to something or someone we love even more." We value our time and money, yet we are willing to give them away to our Lord. Why? "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Through faith, we recognize that God is the Creator and owner of all things. Any "success" we have in life is made possible only by God. Sadly, we often hear or read stories about the self-made millionaire or about the man living "the American dream." Moses warned the Israelites about becoming proud of themselves and forgetful of God: "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the

ability to produce wealth . . ." (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

Money is one of Satan's most effective tools to separate us from an intimate relationship with Jesus. It's shocking, but true: Our love for money can easily become stronger than our love for the Lord. Paul warns Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). These are sobering words. But they are words that God's people need to hear.

Only when we undergo a spiritual attitude adjustment towards things can we begin to give sacrificially. When we believe the truth that God graciously gives us all things, generous giving becomes not only possible but pleasurable. If you struggle in this area, ask God to forgive "me-centered" attitudes. Pray along with King David: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). A new heart is God's gift to you through Christ. With it, we can do what St. Paul says: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

The Lutheran Church has been singing the classic hymn, "Lord, You I Love with All My Heart" with new hearts of faith for over 400 years. The second stanza is a powerful proclamation of our stewardship of God's treasures and God's truth. May we sing it again—with gusto, and live its truths—with zeal, in our day and age:

Lord God, 'twas your rich bounty gave
My body, soul, and all I have

Questions to Ask God about Giving

Q: What is the eternal downside of giving now? What is the eternal downside of delaying giving until later? Am I really in danger of giving too much too soon? Or is the real danger giving too little too late?

Q: If I don't give something now, is it possible I may no longer have it to give later?

Q: If I don't give something now, is it possible I may die before I get a chance to give it later? If my desire is to give it away before I die and I can't know when I'll die, should I give it now?

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 218)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“Religion begat prosperity and the daughter devoured the mother.” – Cotton Mather

“Let temporal things serve your use, but the eternal be the object of your desire.” – Thomas a’ Kempis

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In this poor life of labor.
Lord, grant that I in ev’ry place
May glorify your lavish grace
And serve and help my neighbor.
Let no false doctrine me beguile;
Let Satan not my soul defile.
Give strength and patience unto me
To bear my crosses willingly.
Lord Jesus Christ,
My God and Lord, my God and Lord,
Forsake me not!
I trust your Word. (CW 434:2)

I wasn’t expecting that!

The Tither’s Surprises

The Christian who begins to tithe will be surprised:

- At the amount of money he has for the Lord’s work.
- At the extent to which his own spiritual life deepens.
- At the ease with which the nine-tenths that remains meets his own financial obligations.
- At the ease with which he can give even more than one-tenth.
- At the way in which tithing prepares him to be a faithful and wise steward over all his possessions.
- At himself for not beginning to tithe sooner!

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

God’s Turn to Teach

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. ⁶ So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷ But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. ⁸ I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹ 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 through his poverty might become rich. (NIV)

Learning from the mistakes of others

How Not To Give

The Situation

Don and Sue believe (rightly so!) that Christ has perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament law for them. They believe that when they give, it is not to be a matter of legal compulsion—but of gospel freedom. They have completely written off the practice of tithing because they are not bound by Old Testament ceremonial law. Instead, they give something whenever they feel like it.

The Problem

Last year Don and Sue’s giving amounted to roughly \$30 a month—about one-half of one percent of their income. While they rightly recognize their Christ-accomplished freedom from the law’s requirements, their actions wrongly suggest that grace is about one-twentieth as effective as the law. What would happen if they used freedom from law as an excuse to downplay sexual faithfulness in their marriage? The problem isn’t grace. The problem is using grace as an excuse to put precious little effort into our Christian living and giving.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 191)