

10 for 10

TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 2

Christians are privileged to reflect the giving nature of their God.

First Things First

Giving was rather cut and dried in the Old Testament. Believers were commanded, as a matter of law, to give their tithes to support the Lord's temple. New Testament Christians are called to give, not as a matter of law, but as a matter of Christian freedom.

The Bible says a lot about giving. Solomon, the writer of Proverbs, said: "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9). The Apostle Paul encouraged us to bring our gifts to the house of God on a regular basis, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Giving is not our natural inclination. Greed, not God, once reigned in our hearts. Because of our sinful self-interests, we are inclined to take care of ourselves first and others second. Our natural default is to "get" rather than give. Our Father in heaven knows that giving helps us break the grip that money and possessions has over us. When we give to God first and give him our best, we are showing—in a tangible way—that God, not possessions, comes first in our lives.

Behind our gifts, however, lies a deeper truth. The God who desires mercy instead of sacrifice is the God who wants the GIVER, not just our gifts. He doesn't

need our work. We need our work. He doesn't need our gifts. We need to give. When Jesus asked the rich young man to give all that he had to the poor and follow him, he went away sad (Mark 10). He liked the thought of following Jesus. Tragically, he liked the feel of silver in his fingers far more. Simply put: The rich young man didn't possess his possessions. They possessed him!

God is, at heart, a giving God. The most famous passage in Scripture has the gifts of God at the center: the gift of salvation through the gift of his Son. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God's gifts are not without effect on us! We ourselves now express love through giving because of his great love for us! (1 John 4:19) As recipients of God's grace and love, we are empowered to share God's gifts with him and others.

May God enrich us as we grow in our giving during our *Ten for Ten* effort.

From Luther's Large Catechism

I Believe in God the Father, Creator...

Moreover, we also confess that God the Father has given us not only all that we have and what we see before our eyes, but also that he daily guards and defends us against every evil and misfortune, warding off all sorts of danger and disaster. All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us. But further discussion of this subject belongs in the other two parts of this article, where it says, "Father almighty."

Questions to Ask God about Giving

- Q: In the light of 2 Corinthians 8:14 and 9:11, should I assume that each financial blessing you entrust to me is not intended to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving?**
- Q: Am I being held in orbit around the mass of treasures I've stored up? Have I, perhaps, over accumulated? Have you multiplied my possessions not so I would stockpile them, but so that I would distribute them to the needy?**
- Q: Where and how can I become more active in home and world missions?**
- Q: Am I treating you as the CEO/CFO of "my" assets? Or am I treating you as merely my financial consultant, to whom I pay a consulting fee of a few percent?**

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 218)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“The poorest man I know is the man who has nothing but money.” – John D. Rockefeller

“God created us to love people and use things, but materialists love things and use people.” – R. Alcorn

WELS Schools

As we strive to follow God's directive to “Tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD” (Psalm 78:4), we use some of our first fruit gifts support WELS schools. In our early childhood ministries, Lutheran elementary and high schools, children are blessed to daily learn about their Savior and his message of sin and grace.

Schools and early childhood ministries support our Christian parents in their God-given role and are often opportunities to share the gospel with children and families who still need to learn about their Savior.

May the Lord bless our schools and the next generation as they grow in faith and knowledge of the LORD.



Hence, because everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given, sustained, and protected by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and, in short, to devote all these things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

(Kolb-Wengert, p. 433)

Learning from the mistakes of others

How Not To Give

The Situation

Joan is twenty-two and just finished college. She works about 30 hours a week at minimum wage—making about \$900 a month. Her parents still supply her room and board, but she has to take care

of tuition, books, and other expenses.

“I can’t afford to give,” says Joan. “I can barely make it now. If I tithed \$90 a month to the Lord, I’d have to drop out of school. I’d like to give, but I’m at a point in life where I can’t right now.”

The Problem

Joan is robbing herself of an opportunity to grow in faith. She isn’t trusting God’s promise in Malachi 3 (a theme expanded upon in Matthew 6:33 and Luke 6:38) that he’ll take care of her as she puts God first by giving back to him a significant portion of what is already his. If God is capable of helping her get by on \$900 a month, isn’t he capable of helping her get by on \$810 a month? Joan’s God doesn’t seem very big if he can’t help her compensate for \$90 a month.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 190)

Giving is always about attitude

God’s Stewardship Priorities

Whether we’ve ever taken the time to actually list them or not, we all have—and practice—priorities. Hours spent on social media vs. a few minutes spent socializing with real people might show that we are more into escapism than real friendships. Hours spent on golf every week vs. a few hours spent with God a few times a year shows that the “links” is a higher priority than the Lord.

The Lord is not shy in asking—even commanding—to be our first priority. The First Commandment comes first for a reason. Jesus would have his kingdom and his righteousness be our first priority (Matthew 6:33).

There are other biblical priorities of the heart which impact our life of stewardship:

- Our hearts are at peace with our brothers and sisters before bringing an offering to our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:23-24).
- Our hearts are obedient to the Word of the Lord before bringing a sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:22).
- Our hearts are given to the Lord first before giving an offering (2 Corinthians 8:1-8).
- By the power of the gospel, God wants us to love him with our whole being, and to love our neighbor as our self before we bring our sacrifices and offerings (Mark 12:30-33).

That’s already quite a list! The list could go on even further. The point is clear: God wants us first to get our spiritual priorities in place. Then as his forgiven and repentant people, we give willingly and generously as a reflection of our priorities.

Jesus’ first priority was to perfectly please his heavenly Father. His perfect life was then offered upon the cross for the sake of our misplaced priorities! May the Holy Spirit richly bless our prayerful consideration of our priorities this week!