

# Wisdom and Finance: Created to Give

by Associate Pastor: Jerry Krueger  
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Over the last several weeks we have talked about Restless Heart Syndrome, Affluenza, Credit-itis, and what the world says is the financial model as Christians we should follow.

This morning I want to talk about how God has created each of us to give. Would you hear these words from the writer of Proverbs 11: 24-25? **“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty? A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”** Sound words, don’t you think? But listen to the contemporary language of Eugene Petersen’s, translation in the Message. “The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller. The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.”

When God created humans, he designed us to be generous. We are created with a willingness to give to God and to each other. That is part of our physical and spiritual DNA. Yet, there exist in our culture two loud competing voices that are in a battle against our designed, created desire to give.

1. **The first voice is fear.** This fear says, “Jerry, if you give, there may not be enough left over for you. Then what will happen? What if there is not enough to fill the car with gas, buy the week’s groceries, and pay the light bills?” Fear is a motivator in a negative sense that can keep us from being generous. It can even lead us to hoard what we have.

2. The **second voice is the voice of self gratification.** That voice says, “If you give, you won’t have enough money to buy the stuff you need to make you happy.”

And so what happens? We can find ourselves thinking that there won’t be enough for our basic needs like food, shelter, clothing, and there will not be enough for us to buy what we want.

So how in the heck do we quash these noisy world voices of **fear** and **self gratification**? As a Christian, the voices were defeated when you accepted Christ as Lord and savior. The Holy Spirit is working within us, changing us, shaping us, reminding us that we were created to be generous, to look after others, to give. Everyone wrestles to some degree or another with these voices. But as our faith grows, the volume of the competing voices begins to recede. You see, generosity is a fruit of spiritual growth. Why? Because giving requires that we trust God to supply our needs.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, prayed this prayer, and I know many Methodist pastors who have this prayer hanging in their office or study:

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt;  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering;  
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,  
Exalted for thee or brought low for thee;  
Let me be full, let me be empty;  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing;

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. Amen.

When I pray this prayer, I know that my life is not my own. I realize that my giving is a blessing because I know that my security is in God, not my retirement account.

There is a theological foundation for our generosity. Jesus speaks to us as he says, “It is more blessed to give than receive.” Acts 20:35. In the very act of losing your life for others we understand that we find life. Jesus says “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” Matt. 16:25

Life is a gift and everything belongs to God.

John Wesley was fond of saying, “Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” That is advice.

The story is told that the day after Aristotle Onassis’ funeral, a news reporter asked the great multibillion dollar shipping magnate’s publicity person, “What did he leave?” The public relations spokesperson said, “Everything.” Everything goes back in the box at the end of our lives. A box about 61/2 feet long and two feet wide to be exact.

God owns all of our stuff. We are merely like they say in Leviticus 25:23, stewards. “The land is mine...you are but aliens and tenants.” We are managers, stewards of the resources God gives us and lets us use for a while.

God expects us to care for our families by providing adequate housing, food, and clothing. A large portion of what we have and earn is to be used for those needs. God also wants us to enjoy our lives, and not to live destitute lives. But God also expects that we will not be self focused and ignore the widow, orphan and alien among us. We are to care for the least, the lost, and to fight for justice when that injustice appears.

The Scriptures also teach us we are to return a portion of our earnings and livelihood to God. In the Old Testament, God’s people returned a portion of their offerings to God. Whether it was livestock, the harvest, proceeds from commerce, people gave back to God. Later on, the people brought the offerings to the Temple and the priests. One-tenth of the crop, flock, or income was a gift offered to God. Abraham did it; and Jacob instituted a covenant with God in Genesis 28: 20-22.

As Christians we live under a new covenant, and we understand that we are not bound by the Law of Moses. So for us, the tithe, one tenth, is a guide. Most Christians agree that the tithe is a good guideline for our lives and that must be pleasing to God. Tithes go to the church so that the church might accomplish the work of the Kingdom. Tithes go to feed the poor, help with those in need, help some of our own members when they are in crisis, and allow us to participate as a congregation in mission and outreach.

But, I know that the idea of tithing is a challenge for many. Especially when we battle the voices of fear and self gratification. David Slagle is pastor of VERITAS Church in Decatur, Georgia, and uses this illustration.

9 red apples, 1 yellow apple.

God has given us all ten apples, and nine are ours to use and enjoy. Some are used to care for family, pay the rent or mortgage, pay for food, vacation, retirement, some to give away. But the tenth apple is holy to God and for Him. We give this apple first as an act of spiritual discipline and as a part of our love for God. This is a way for us to honor, to express love, praise, obedience, faithfulness and devotion to God.

But, here is where it might be difficult. We think, "I can put a bit more in retirement this month," so we take a bite out of the God apple, we eat out more than normal this month, so we catch up on bills by taking another bite, the medical emergency catches us by surprise, we cover it with another bite from God's apple, a bite here, a nibble there. Sometimes before we know it, God does not get our first fruits, **he gets our leftovers.**

When we give our first fruits to God, we don't worry about it, because it is not there. It is already in God's care.

Hear me people of God. This is not about you giving 10 percent if you are not able. But hear these words that I read in some of his books and have heard from Rev. Dr. Herb Miller, a member of this church. "What is the percentage of your income that God is calling you to give?" "What is the percentage of your income God is calling you to give?"

Have you prayed about it? It will be different for each of us.

If you currently give two percent, what would it be like to give three, maybe four percent this year? Have you thought about that?

We do not want to be **May Day** givers; rather we strive to be **pay day** givers. We don't give to get. That is not biblical. It is better to give consistently, developing the habit of being a Payday giver, giving regularly the percentage that God is calling you to give, rather than feeling like you are so far behind that you can't give at all.

I have been a tither for a long time. Yet there have been times when the world has crept in and said, "Jerry, don't give this month, this pay check - pay off that other bill. Use it to go to the mall, to the beach, the mountains. Don't you want that new set of golf clubs? Etc, etc."

When I was starting out in life I tithed, and it could be a struggle, yet my car never got repossessed, I kept my lights on, I paid the rent.

I will not battle with you over tithing, giving on the gross or net. Some say one thing, others another, and there are all kinds of interpretations. But hear me church. We are created to be generous. And we are created to give. This is about you being in harmony with what God is calling you to give.

A man approached Rev. Peter Marshall who had been the chaplain of the US Senate. The man said, "Rev. Marshall, I used to tithe regularly but now my income is at the \$500,000 mark and there is no way I can give \$50,000." Rev. Marshall thought for a bit, and then said, "I see your problem, let's pray about it." Marshall bowed his head and prayed with boldness and authority,

“Heavenly Father, I pray that you would reduce this man’s salary back to the place that he can afford to tithe.” .....What?

Hear me church, each of us regardless of our income level is faced with the same question: “How many apples are enough? As nine apples grow to 20, then 40, and more, I have two choices as do you:

1. Store them in the storehouse or 2. Share them with others.

I must tell you that at one time I believed as a younger man that the tithe was the top end. But, as God would reveal to me, it is a jumping off point. God encourages us to give beyond the tithe.

For many of you that is where you set money aside for missions, for extra giving for the chapel, extra giving for funding kids at church camp.

Your tithes and offerings, your committed giving at the percentage God has put on your heart is a sign of a desire to live and grow wholly for God.

Does my offering and tithe to God mean anything to God?

For 1,600 years of biblical history the primary way people honored and worshipped God was not through song or hearing a sermon. Rather it was building an altar and offering the first fruits of one’s labor on the altar. The scent of the burned offering was pleasing to God. It’s not that God loved the smell of cooked grain and meat, rather God saw people giving a gift that expressed love, faith and a desire to please and honor God.

I read a story about a family that went to Wyoming to camp in the National Park there. The dad gave each of his three kids \$20 to spend at a store during the week at Jackson Hole. The first day the youngest daughter looked in the gift shop, tried on a variety of hats, and picked one up, and spent her \$20 on the hat. Her dad was upset with her and chided her for spending all of her money on a hat all at once. He said, “You won’t have ANY money left for the week. You spent all you had on this hat. What were you thinking?” The family got into the car, and drove to a lake where they hiked through the lovely scenery. When they stopped for a break, the little girl walked up to her dad and said, “Daddy, I bought this hat for you. I wanted you to wear it all week. That’s why I spent my money on this hat today. It is for you. I love you.”

The dad grabbed his daughter and sat on a bench and began to cry. He said that the hat, well worn and faded now, is one of his most treasured possessions. She gave all her spending money because she wanted to tell her daddy she loved him.

That is how God looks at our offerings. They are not business deals to be entered in on a ledger sheet of pluses and minuses. Your offering is a way of saying, “I am giving back a portion of my earnings to you because I love you and want to say thank you.”

2 Corinthians 9:7 gives us these words of assurance: “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

When we become financially bound up in our giving, we are undergoing a spiritual problem. We are taking in, but not getting rid of anything. We were created for generosity and if we become so self absorbed, money consumed, joyless people, we can become a people filled with joylessness.

The way to find relief is to give. To God, to family, to the church, to neighbor and others who are in need. That is what will fill us with joy. Proverbs 11:24-25 lined it out for us. The more we give, the more generous we become. Sometimes there is trepidation and timidity when we first begin to give. But as we learn to give, we become more generous.

A 15-year-old young boy named Jeff attends the Kansas School for the Blind and received chemo and treatment for his eye condition, and he now can see the large "E" on the eye chart. This young man bakes, paints and sells his creations to raise money for the Children's Tumor Foundation. So far he raised over \$15,000.

Five years ago he was contacted by the Make a Wish Foundation, and asked what his wish was. It was to hear Elton John in concert. So he meets Elton John backstage prior to the concert. The two talk and Jeff tells Elton John his story. Jeff gives Elton a package of thank you cards that he has painted. As Elton is leaving, Jeff gives him a check for \$1000 for the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

A week later the Children's Tumor Foundation called Jeff and said that a \$5,000 gift had been given in his name by Elton John. Jesus tells us, "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you give back." Luke 6:38.

Hear me church, we do not give so that we can get something in return. But when we give to God, the blessings seem to come back to us.

Today know that you are blessed with the opportunity to know Jesus Christ. Today you are blessed to know that you are forgiven. Today know that you are blessed by being so loved by the Lord of all creation, that he would send his Son to give his life for you so you might live a life of forgiveness, love and salvation.

Today we celebrate communion, a meal we can all share in Christ's presence. Let's bow our heads as we pray in God's presence.