

**Giving
What's Next?**

**February 14, 2021
Dan Hamel**

Last week a family in our church invited Keren and I and our family over to their house to share a meal. We had a wonderful time together, ate some great food, and then afterward Hudson and I went outside to this guy's shed to see his tractor and some of the projects he had been working on. And this guy is a deer hunter and showed Hudson this piece of a deer hide from his recent taxidermy work. Hudson loved it, and my friend decided to give it to him. So Hudson ran back in the house to show off his new deer. The other kids in the house wanted to see the deer and pet the deer. But my son, even though it was given to him as a gift by this family, refused. He pulled it close to himself and said, "No, no, no. It's my deer. It's my deer." So I took him to another room and talked with him. I reminded him that it was a gift, that it's always best to share, and I wanted him to be excited about playing with the deer with his friends. Fortunately, his attitude changed, we went back into the common space, and all the kids were able to take turns petting the deer.

Anyone who has raised young children has witnessed the inherent selfishness of human nature. We know that kids need a parent to guide and instruct them, helping them learn how to share. And if we are humble, wise, and discerning enough, we would realize that even as we get older, into our twenties, thirties and forties, our fifties, sixties and seventies, that selfish nature can still show its face more often than we'd like to realize or admit. And on occasion, we still need our Heavenly Father to sit us down, have a conversation with us and remind us that everything we have has been given to us as a gift, and that it is always better to share.

We are in the last week of our series called "What's Next." Over the past 6 weeks we've had some great conversations about the next steps that God is calling us to take. We've talked about baptism, overcoming strongholds, forgiveness. Two weeks ago we talked about committing to a local church, and we'd invite you to go to the homepage of our website and look at what it means to be a partner here. And if God is calling you to be a part of this family of faith, sign your name to that. Last week we talked about serving, and we've had dozens of people reach out to express their desire to serve. You can still get on our website and check on those opportunities if you haven't.

Today, we get to talk about the next step of *giving*. And I know even as I say that it makes some people uncomfortable. Anytime you mix religion and money it can seem manipulative or intrusive, and make us feel awkward. But I want to give you a slightly different way of thinking about it. So, before any walls go up, we should all recognize that the church has a responsibility to teach the Scriptures. That's what we do. We study God's word. How many times do you think God mentions money in the Bible? Let me give you a multiple choice:

- A) 2.3
- B) 23
- C) 230
- D) 2300

The correct answer is D! There are *2300 different verses* in the Bible pertaining to money. So even if it makes us uncomfortable, even if it is not our first choice of topics, a church is not doing its job if they are not talking about money.

And I want you to ask yourself an even deeper question: “Why?” Why does God talk about money 2300 times in this book? Is God obsessed with money? No! He’s not. But he knows that we are. I’ve certainly struggled with that at times in my life. God knows how important finances are to us and what a central role money plays in our lives. We have to deal with it every day. And so again and again and again in his Word he teaches us how to handle money in a way that is wise and worshipful. He teaches us not to be greedy, not to be takers and to hoard, but to be givers. He teaches us to share, to look for ways to use resources to bless others, enrich people’s lives, and advance his kingdom.

Now, I went to bible college to study the Bible and train for ministry. My wife went to a state university to major in journalism. I graduated and became a pastor. She graduated and became the editor for a newspaper in Kentucky’s capital. I want to blend our educations today and approach my sermon like a journalist would. I want to ask the questions about giving that a journalist would showing up to the scene of a crime – who, what, when, where, why – and I want to answer every one of those questions from Scripture so we can see what God’s word has to say about it, and talk about what it should look like in our lives.

So the first question: *Who?* Who is supposed to give? This question shouldn’t take us very much time, because the answer is everyone! When God instructed his people in the Old Testament about giving, this is what he said in Exodus 34:20: “No one is to appear before me empty-handed.” Those words, *no one*, are important. *Everyone* was expected to give something.

Now there were qualifications that allowed people who had less to give less. When a child was born, the mother was supposed to bring a sacrifice to the Lord of a year-old lamb. But God says in Leviticus 12:8: “If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons.” Not everyone could afford a lamb. The Bible tells us that even Mary, the mother of Jesus, was so poor that she could not afford a lamb. Think about the irony of that. The woman who brought the lamb of God into the world was in such poverty she couldn’t even afford a lamb as a sacrifice. And yet she still brought two small birds. Whether you had a little, or a lot, or a medium amount, everyone is supposed to bring something. That sets us up for a slightly more complicated question...

What? What are we supposed to give? This question requires a little more nuance. Let me read for you a few of the commands given in the OT. Leviticus 27:30: “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.” I want to point out this word: *tithe*. This word literally just means a tenth, or 10%. But take note of this, it’s not just that he’s saying you should decide to be generous and give your 10% to him, he says that 10% actually *belongs* to the Lord. It might be in your possession, but it is rightfully his. That’s why later on in the Bible God accuses his people of stealing from him. And they are like, “What do you mean, how can you steal from God?” And God says, “In tithes and offerings.” So this passage shows us that God expects us to give him 10%, because it rightfully belongs to him. But there’s more to it than just that.

Exodus 34:26 says, “Bring the best of the first fruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. What I want to point out is this word right here: *best*. It was the ancient world, so their assets and currency were different than ours (we have dollar bills, they had fruit, vegetables and

grain they grew, livestock they raised). And God always asked for the *best* of what they had. Not the food that had spoiled, not the crippled animals, not the leftovers, not damaged goods. So God not only expected 10%, he expected the *best* 10%.

But there is even more: Exodus 35:29 says, “All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do.” And the words I want to highlight here for you are *freewill offering*. Which is an offering that wasn’t required, it’s not something that rightfully belonged to the Lord, but it was something that people decided to give as an expression of thanks to God. So, if we take all of that together, here’s what we know from the Old Testament: everyone was required to give not just 10%, but the best 10% of what they had to God. And sometimes, when God had been uniquely good to them, or when specific needs arose, they gave even beyond 10% as an expression of thanks and gratitude to God.

So, you can see there is some nuance to this, but let me complicate it even more: every one of those commands is in the Old Testament. Everything we read in the Old Testament is true and right, but not all the commands are relevant for us today. And typically the way we determine if an Old Testament command is required to be obeyed is if the command is repeated in the New Testament. The New Testament repeats the commands about telling the truth, about honoring our parents, about being faithful to our spouse (so we still have to obey those), but the New Testament doesn’t repeat the commands about the sort of cloths we are supposed to wear or the types of food we are allowed to eat (so we don’t have to obey those). And here’s the thing: the New Testament never commands a tithe. So there is a lot of debate: should New Testament believers tithe just like the people in the OT did?

I’ll share with you how I have come to think about this, but there are also men and women who are smarter and more like Jesus than me who think differently. If in the Old Covenant God’s people were expected to give the best 10% of everything they had, and then they regularly gave above and beyond that when there were needs or when they were uniquely blessed, I can’t see any reasons why we would do less than that in the New Covenant. The New Covenant is so much better than the old. Their covenant was established by the blood of bulls and goats. Our covenant was established by the blood of Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins and to give us the promise of eternal life. We have the covenant they longed for. I just can’t see any way that we would look at the beauty and wonder and superiority of the New Covenant and give less than they did in the Old Covenant. I think if anything, we should give more.

So what I encourage Christians to do, and this is an encouragement, not a command, and this is what Keren and I have done our entire adult lives. We set a number to give that is above 10% of our gross income. To give God the first and the best of everything that is entrusted to you. Disciplined, regular giving. And give that as an expression of obedience to God. And then, as you see God uniquely bless you or needs and giving opportunities come up, give above and beyond your normal giving as an expression of gratitude to God. We are people who have been saved by the grace and love of God. We are not looking to give the lowest possible amount, we are not looking to nickel and dime God. We want to be abundant toward him as he has been abundant toward us. And we would much rather get to the end of our lives and hear God say, “You gave even more than I expected, well done, good and faithful servant, here is your reward.”

than hear him say, “You kept back too much for yourself,” or, “You only gave the bare minimum.” We want God to see generosity in our hearts, not stinginess.

The questions we’ve covered so far: who? and what? Up next: *when?* When are we supposed to give? This is an important question. Does God want people to start giving when they graduate from college? When they get their first job? When they get their first full time job? When they pay off all their debt? When they reach a certain income level? Once their kids finally move out of the house? When am I supposed to give? And the answer is: now. There is never a time in our lives when God does not want us to give. As we are training our children and they make a little money here and there, or grandma gives them \$10, we should train them to give \$1, and allow them to give more if they want. When you are in high school or college working a minimum wage job, tithe on your minimum wage job, and learn to be faithful with a few things to show that you can be entrusted with many things.

No one is a better inspiration to me about this than my own mother. I mentioned this last week, my parents didn’t live together for a decent portion of my childhood. My mom had to do everything she could to scrap by to provide for us. She worked a full-time retail job throughout the day, and then worked a part time job in the evenings. We still had so little. We were on food stamps and subsidies for part of the time. And yet I still saw my mom give. I called her up this week to ask her about it, and I just said, “Mom, walk me through that. We had next to nothing, you were doing everything you could just to get by. How did you give?” She said, “Our church was so seeker sensitive that they never talked about money. But as I read and studied the bible on my own, I saw very clearly from God’s Word that he wanted his people to tithe at the very minimum. And deep in my heart, as soon as I became aware that there was something God wanted me to do, I wanted to obey him. I wanted to honor him. I didn’t give a lot extra at the time, but my first 10%, even when it was so hard, started going to God.” And then she said, “Dan, you have no idea the way God provided. People would randomly drop off food and laundry detergent at the door. I was able to find a better job. Every need we ever had was met. And I began to see God’s provision in undeniable ways as soon as I began to give to God.” My mom is such an incredible inspiration of faithful, sacrificial giving to me. If a single mom of 5 kids, working two jobs, can give, then the answer to the question, “When should I give?” is all the time. Don’t wait. Just like my mom told me on the phone: “As soon as I learned what God’s will was, my immediate desire was to obey it.” The answer to the question about when we should give is always, and now! Whatever season of life you are in is a season where God is calling you to begin.

Who, what, when...the next question is *where*. Where should we give? And again, this is a question that requires some nuance. In the Old Testament the answer was pretty easy: you give to the priests who ran the tabernacle and later the temple. Malachi 3:10 says, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.” God didn’t just command people to be generous and give 10% of their money away at random...to family and friends and people on the street who had needs, he told them where to give it, into his storehouse. And when people gave to the temple, all the funds were used to meet the needs of the priests, upkeep for the temple, fund ministry initiatives, and taking care of the poor. Now that doesn’t mean that people never gave to anyone or anything else, it just means that their tithe went to the tabernacle or temple.

What does that mean for us today? There is no tabernacle, there is no physical temple in Jerusalem. There is no New Testament verse that tells you where all you give needs to go. There are plenty of examples of people bringing their gifts to the leaders of the church who then distribute the funds according to the needs. But there is no command. So I think this is another example where we need to be wise. My personal conviction, and what Keren and I have practiced our entire adult lives, is we bring our gift to our local church that we are a part of, because we believe that is the most God-honoring and strategic thing we can do with the lion's share of our giving. When you give to a healthy, Bible-based local church, you are doing all of the things that were accomplished with the Old Testament tithe. You take care of the building where people gather to worship, you are helping to pay for the salary of full-time pastoral staff who are serving the needs of the church and the community, and you are paying to help the under-resourced in our community and fund ministry initiatives.

When you give to this church, for example, you are keeping our doors open and our lights on, you are paying for about 45 staff people to give their full-time effort to serve our church and community, and you are also funding our ministry initiatives. When you give to this church you are helping to feed hundreds of families in our community. You are helping to pay for utilities and rent for families who have fallen on hard times. You are helping to plant several churches across the United States, you are helping to fund mission work on several different continents, rescuing kids from trafficking in Cambodia, building a hospital in India, educating orphans in Africa. We literally have four full time people whose only job is to identify some of the most strategic kingdom work going on in our city, in our country, and around our world. When you give to The Creek, you are funding those initiatives. Which is why I believe giving to your local church is not just a biblical principle, it is the most strategic thing you can do with your giving.

Now, it's not the only place we can give. Again, I think a very wise thing to do is to bring your tithe to your local church, and then look for ways to give above and beyond that as opportunities come up. Help someone adopt a child, sponsor a compassion child from Kenya, encourage a missionary to Afghanistan.

Who should give? Everyone. What should we give? There is no New Testament command, but a wise biblical principle is to give at least 10%. When should you give? Not when you reach a certain financial milestone, but in every season of life, whether you have a lot or a little. Where should you give? Again, no direct New Testament command is given, but a wise biblical principle is to your spiritual family, to the church, and then look for ways to give above and beyond that as needs and opportunities arise.

All of that leads to the final question: *Why?* This is a hard one, because there are so many answers to this question. We should give because it honors God. Anytime we see him give us a command in his Word and we obey it, it honors him. We should give because giving breaks the oppressive power of materialism and greed in our lives. We all have this tendency of keeping what we have for ourselves, but deciding to give our resources away reorients our approach to finances. We aren't here to be takers, we are here to be givers. Giving invites God's blessing on your financial affairs. In almost every other area of the Bible God's word tells us, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." But in Malachi 3 God actually says, "Test me in this." God is challenging you to test him. Give to him. Give him your first and your best...and he says: Watch

as I bless you in ways you could never have imagined. Watch as you are able to do far more with my blessing than you ever would have been able to without it. And I have talked to family after family around here, at The Creek, who have seen that to be true. They have given above and beyond their normal giving to the church the last two years to help us become debt free and to accomplish some new missional objectives over the last two years. They have given more than they have ever given, and they have seen God bless them more than they even thought possible. I've had some people say that they are almost confused, "I'm giving more than I've ever given, but I still have more than I've ever had."

There are so many reasons to give, but I want to highlight two: *First, generosity changes lives.* Generosity changes peoples' lives. When you give, you are helping others to hear the gospel and find salvation. You are helping people learn the Word of God and grow as a disciple. When you give, you are helping a family pay rent and have food to eat. When you give, you are helping orphans be educated and loved. Giving changes lives. At the end of the day, what is more satisfying: having another new shirt, always having the newest car, or knowing that you had the privilege of changing someone's life? No one should have to twist our arm or guilt trip us to give. Because we should think of giving not as an obligation but rather as an opportunity. That's the first reason, generosity changes lives. And the second reason is: *giving makes you more like Jesus.* When the apostle Paul was encouraging the Christians in Corinth to give, this is what he told them: "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" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus gave all that he has for us, so that in our poverty we might become rich. In Jesus we see a generous and self-giving God, and there is no possible way to become more like him without becoming more generous and giving ourselves.

I've had a lot of people ask me, especially in the midst of COVID, how are we doing financially as a church. And the answer is really well! God has been really good to us, and you as our church family have been very faithful and generous. We just finished a two-year window where we asked people to consider giving more to the church, and we were able to pay off 3.5 million dollars of debt and put hundreds of thousands of dollars toward ministry initiatives. My hope and prayer is that, from this point forward, even though those two years are done, we will continue to have generous hearts. We are in a good place, we aren't talking about keeping the lights on and making payroll, we're talking about incredible initiatives that are in front of us: helping people in our community, transforming our city in the name of Jesus, planting churches, sending missionaries, changing lives for eternity. And I sure hope that as we look at opportunities to give, we don't grab our deer and say, "No, no, no, it's mine, mine, mine." But that we take the things that matter to us, our house, our car, our bank account, and we realize it's been given to us by God, and we want to be generous and excited to share. For many, that's the next step God is calling us to take. Let's pray.