

Biblical Guide to Financial Generosity

God calls us to live generous lives. This has been modelled by Jesus who gave his whole life for us, and he invites us to experience abundant life by following him. Consider these scriptures:

2 Corinthians 8:9 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. †

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. †

It is clear that Jesus calls us to surrender our whole lives to him, not just our finances. However, scripture is clear that financial giving is a part of living generous lives.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. †

We are directed in a number of clear ways about our financial giving:

All we have belongs to God.

The Bible portrays people as managers rather than owners of creation (James 1:17; Psalm 24:1). We see that everything we have, and even the ability to make money comes from the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:18). When we give it is really only giving him a portion of his resources back, and this allows us to give with gratitude.

The Lord expects us to give.

The Old Testament directives for worship are continually centred around the expectation of giving that which is valuable to the Lord. When Jesus teaches on financial giving (Matthew 6), he talks about "when" we give, not "if" we give. Similarly the Apostle Paul speaks about financial giving as something that is expected, not optional (1 Corinthians 16).

We should give money to worship God, not to impress people.

Jesus says that our giving should be private and not showy (Matthew 6; Mark 12:41-44). In fact he says that if we give with the motive of impressing people, that is all the reward we will get. Really when we give we should view God as the primary person we are giving to.

We should give to support the ministry of the church and help those in need.

Because our spiritual need is truly our greatest need, there is a continual call in scripture to support church ministry and specifically to provide financial blessing to those Christian workers who bring spiritual blessing into our lives (Galatians 6:6; 1

Timothy 5:17-18). We are also called to live benevolent, generous lives especially to those with obvious needs. This should start with our families (1 Timothy 5:8), and also include those with practical needs in our community and around the world (Matthew 25:35-40).

We should give regularly, proportionally and sacrificially according to our means.

The model in the Old Testament was to regularly tithe (give God the first 10 percent) out of our income (Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:10). In reality when you consider all the offering requirements of the Old Testament law, about 25% was expected in total. In the New Testament giving in proportion to our means (income) remains a good way to approach giving (2 Corinthians 8:11). If you are not sure what to give, we believe a good place to start would be with the common Christian practice of giving your regular tithe (the first 10 percent of your income) to your church and additional regular and spontaneous offerings to those in need and to other Kingdom workers. If you genuinely can't tithe right now, start by giving something regularly and consider what lifestyle changes are necessary to be able to give more generously. Overall, Jesus' example of giving his life for us should continually inspire to greater heights in all areas of generosity (2 Corinthians 8:9).

We should ask the Lord how to give, and then give cheerfully.

If we give out of duty or compulsion God doesn't want our money! Rather we should ask God for his leading, decide in our hearts, then give with joy and without frustration (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). Along with this, when we give we should truly "give" and not attach strings to our money. It is wrong to favour the rich or to try to buy spiritual influence (James 2:1-9; Acts 8:18-24).

Generosity points our hope in the right direction.

Jesus says that where we put our treasure, our hearts will follow (Matthew 6:21). By saying this, Jesus offers generosity as an opportunity to direct our hearts towards those things we value most. Paul follows this train of thought by encouraging us who are rich in this world not to put our hope in wealth but rather to put our hope in God (1 Timothy 6:17-19). In this way, he says, we can "will lay up treasure for [ourselves] as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that [we] may take hold of the life that is truly life."

There is great blessing and reward when we give.

Nearly every time God calls us to give, he clarifies that when we give to him there is great reward in return (Malachi 3:10-12; Matthew 6:4). He says, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

At its core, financial giving is really a matter of the heart.

When Jesus saw a widow put a penny in the temple treasury, he told his followers that she gave more than those who gave massive sums of money because she gave sacrificially (Mark 12:41-44). This story teaches us that it is really our heart and willingness to follow Jesus generously and sacrificially that pleases the Lord. Giving should never be an area of shame for a follower of Jesus, but rather an area of joy. Jesus teaches us to live more generously every day, and to experience the increase of his blessing in our lives as we do.