

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S - The Midas Trap and How to Avoid it - Part five

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10 REASONS YOU SHOULD START GIVING MORE TO YOUR LOCAL CHURCH

Malachi 3:10-11 - "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. [11] I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts."

It is only our fallen tendency to **accumulate** that causes us to reason if we **give more** to the Lord we will end up with **less** for ourselves. After all, you can only cut the pie into so many pieces. A bigger piece for **God** must mean a smaller piece for **me**. And nothing makes Jesus' words about "**denying self**" more vivid and punchy than regularly parting with bill-paying, pleasure-producing money to extend His church.

This is why, along with the Biblical **commands obligating** sacrificial giving, the Bible extends **promises encouraging** sacrificial giving. Repeatedly our faithful God promises faithful giving to the Lord brings His finest blessings into our lives. Let me finish this series of studies listing ten of them:

One, regular giving organizes our lives. Paul said people should learn to give regularly - "**on the first day of the week**" - as they came to worship - **1 Corinthians 16:2** - "**On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.**"

The background of these instructions grows out of Paul's desire that the church in Corinth provide aid for the church in Jerusalem. But he doesn't want their giving to be an emotional one shot appeal that he himself makes when he arrives. That's why, in the rest of the words of the verse from which I quoted, he tells them he doesn't want to take up some big offering when he arrives. He doesn't want it to be **his** presence and his emotional appeal that boosts the offering.

He tells them their giving should be **organized** giving. It should be a dominant part of their regular worship. It should be **regular** - "**On the first day of every week....**" It should include **everyone** - "**....each one of you....**"

But the main point here is this Sunday giving should be **planned and prioritized** - "**....each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper....**" In other words, people should **organize** their lives Monday through Saturday **to make sure** they aren't caught unprepared to give on Sunday. You put your giving into your weekly budget. Nothing will make you **remember** God like this will.

Two, giving makes our spiritual lives authentic. **Martin Luther** said every person needed two conversions - one of the **heart** and the other of the **pocketbook**. Nothing weakens our lives like hypocrisy. Giving moves our commitment to God out of the realm of **theory** and **ceremony** into **practice**. **Sunday giving brings God's visible reign into weekly living**. It is the one sure way to keep your faith from being all pious talk. You will feel genuine.

Paul says giving is actually a sign of God's grace at work in our hearts - **2 Corinthians 8:7** - "**But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.**"

This is Paul's reminder we cannot make our offering a **separate part** of our participation in God's grace from the **rest** of our obedience to His Word. The whole of the spiritual life is **one organic piece**. And the promise is God will multiply His grace **in all areas** as we honor Him in regular, sacrificial giving.

Three, giving opens up our lives to greater responsibility in God's kingdom. This was a principle frequently on the lips of our Lord - **Luke 16:10-11** - "**One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. [11] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?**"

Notice those two words, "**faithful**" and "**entrust**." Faithful **stewardship** relates directly to deeper **participation in Christ** (entrust). God knows how faithful I am with the wealth He has provided. God **sees** what I give and what I spend on myself. But I have come to see more **promise** in that fact than **threat**. God uses our wealth as a great **testing ground** of our faithfulness to Him - like your doctor checks your blood pressure. As our lives prove genuine in this discipline other doors of growth begin to open up. Your giving

doesn't just grow your **charitable receipt**. Your giving grows **you** in ways you can't even fully see yet.

Somehow, without messing things up with an unscriptural prosperity theology, it seems Jesus places some kind of link with my family and my prayer life and my marriage with my faithfulness when the offering plate comes around. That seems to be the kernel of mysterious truth in Jesus' haunting question - "**Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?**"(11).

Notice again, money isn't the **same** as true riches. But faithful **giving** of money is the **means** of receiving true riches.

Four, giving reduces the downward drag of greed and selfishness in our lives. The carnal heart is preoccupied with **getting**. God aims to root that selfishness out of His children. Giving is the spade with which He digs.

Hear this. The battle with covetousness must be fought on an ongoing basis. This is the reason behind the command for **weekly** giving. We never end this battle with greed once and for all. It resides in our nature like **aging** resides in our nature. The only way the back of covetousness is broken in our lives is a regular giving of enough magnitude to cause me to **feel** the reality of limiting **personal consumption**. A small offering has no effect on a covetous heart. Satan laughs when God's people merely **tip** God financially.

Five, giving brings protection from the devourer. Those are the very words of promise from our opening text - **Malachi 3:11** - "**I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts.**"

This is not some greed-promoting promise of unlimited wealth. It's a promise about the enjoyment of life. Israel's crops were being eaten by pests as quickly as they grew. **The people worked hard but didn't enjoy the fruit of their effort.** God promised to protect their work as they honoured Him with their offerings.

There's an eternal principle here. At issue is **how do we secure our lives?** And the beauty of our Malachi text is the way it deals with a threat to Israel's future over which she could have no control on her own. This was not an age when farmers could spray for pests nor insure their crops.

So how do you cope with threatening circumstances you can't control? Answer? **You honour God with what you can control.** God will bring His special protection to enforce the lives of those who honour Him with their giving. Can you afford to be without this?

Six, giving helps and blesses other people. In our gifts, God allows us to **partner with Him** in touching the world with the love of Jesus Christ. He said he would actually **audit** all such gifts Himself. None would lose his reward:

Matthew 25:35-40 - "**For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' [40] And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'**"

Seven, giving helps us to set our hearts on eternal realities. We all want to love God more than we do. But we get earthbound in our thinking and living. Sometimes we deceive ourselves by thinking we can **generate** love for God by crinkling up our faces more during worship time. It won't work.

Jesus said material possessions have a direct effect on desire for God. He said material goods prevent even serious study of God's Word from having any good effect on our heart. They make it almost impossible to **enjoy God**:

Matthew 13:22 - "**As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**"

Giving frees us from the deception of sin and truly liberates our lives. Giving brings the life and power of God's Word to germinate in all areas of our lives. The love of wealth causes all our other spiritual pursuits to turn sluggish and unreal. We all need to give **enough** to **train our affections toward eternity**. Proportionately small offerings can never do this. Give more. Jesus said this will keep your

possessions from **“choking”** (Jesus’ word! I saw a person choking in a restaurant once.) your soul.

Eight, giving evangelizes the world with the gospel. Nothing is closer to God’s heart than this. Giving sends missionaries, builds churches and Bible Schools, puts up hospitals and prints Bibles. This is the most important work in the world. And it is totally dependant on the giving of God’s people.

Nine, giving touches our lives with immortality right now on this earth. The Bible says we are actually laying up treasure in heaven with every gift we give. There are two portions of Scripture I want to link together under this point. The second is well known. The first less so:

Psalm 49:16-17 - “Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. [17] For **when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him.**”

Matthew 6:19-21 - “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

There is an ***upside down*** glory in this world. You can see this material glory on television and social media. It is the world’s picture of the good life and how to have it. But it is all left at death. It is glory with an ***expiry date***. But Jesus says there’s a glory that carries on and multiplies forever and ever.

Never forget that wherever you put your money, your heart goes with it. Most of the things we do won’t be remembered very long. But our gifts to the Lord change everything for eternity. God will see to this Himself.

Philippians 4:15-17 - “And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. [17] **Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.**”

This is Paul repeating the point of Jesus’s words - “***...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.***” Paul re-emphasizes the almost too-good-to-be-true idea that there comes eternal ***“credit”*** (Paul’s word, not mine) from giving to the Lord’s work. And in ***this*** age such giving prevents inward corruption of heart.

Ten, giving fills the heart with life’s truest joy. We should always take special note when the Bible tells us we need to ***“remember”*** something - **Acts 20:35** - “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, **it is more blessed to give than to receive.**”

There is no question at all that it feels blessed to ***receive***. We all like getting gifts. But when Paul calls us to ***remember*** what Jesus said about the greater blessing of ***giving*** he surely means we are highly prone to ***forget*** it. He means most Christians have yet to learn in full measure that God has an even greater joy for His children than ***receiving***. It’s the fuller, deeper, and more lasting joy of becoming a giver. I urge you, discover it sooner rather than later. Don’t live one more day not knowing where life’s greatest happiness is found.

Friend, you can study the subject of giving until Jesus comes back. You can learn all the verses and answer all the questions. None of that will turn you into a growing, giving person. You have to start giving. And you have to start now or you won’t start at all.