

\$UCCESSFUL TEWARDSHIP

TAKING GOOD CARE OF GOD'S MONEY

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1. Motivated Giving

In the work of the church, projects that cost money are inevitable. It is not *if* we require funds to undertake a certain work or project, it is *when* we will be called upon to give towards a special need or renovation project. Buildings need repair and renovation; new opportunities for mission work come before us; as the church family grows so does the need for various programs or additional staff. I mention all of this as an introduction to the theme of this short book which is, Successful Stewardship.

¹ Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

- I Corinthians 4:1-2

The word "steward" in the Greek (original language of the New Testament) refers to one who manages or administers, and the term "stewardship" refers to the thing managed. In this passage, Paul sees himself as a manager in charge of the gospel message and its proclamation throughout the Roman Empire. In the church we are also

tasked as stewards of the gospel and its preaching to our community and the world. This is where the idea of money comes into play because the preaching of the gospel to the lost, and the teaching of Jesus' words unto obedience to the church has, among other things, a financial requirement.

For this reason, our stewardship of the gospel is closely tied to our stewardship of money. I believe that good financial stewardship is necessary for effective church work because most church work requires money. This, then, is the guiding principle behind this material on Successful Stewardship because stewardship begins with giving and successful stewardship requires not only generosity but giving with a right attitude.

MOTIVATION FOR GIVING

If you were to ask coaches in professional sports what their main job was, they would tell you that providing motivation was probably their most important task. Pro athletes know the basics, the rules, the game; the assistant coaches and special coaches continue to work with them on these things. The pros are already in top physical condition and there are other trainers and personnel who help them stay that way. Their lawyers, agents and accountants keep track of the money and career moves.

However, the head coach is the one who sustains the motivation for a millionaire player (who probably does not need the money or attention as he once did as a rookie) to give his best, beyond his best, game after game after game. With the right motivation a mediocre player can be a great player, a great player can become star and star can become a legend.

When it comes to giving in the church, the same principles apply:

- It is not about how much money you have (many complain that it would be easier if we had a couple of millionaires as members in each local congregation).

- It is not how old you are in Christ (some say that when there are many young Christians in a congregation, it is hard to raise a large contribution because inexperienced believers are not usually very steady or generous in their giving).
- It is not how big the church is (others think that unless you are a mega-sized church you cannot aspire to raise a lot of money because you are too few in number).

Generous giving is not about wealth, experience, or size, it is about motivation. If a group of believers give from the proper motivation, they can reach whatever goal the Lord puts before them. And make no mistake, if the growth that the church experiences is provided by the Lord, the resources needed to provide and maintain this growth will also come from the Lord.

So the question becomes, "What is our motivation in giving?" We all give to a lesser or greater degree, but each is motivated differently when it comes to giving in a religious context. In answer to this question, I want us to review some of the particular motivations outlined in a series on the subject of giving by Dr. Gregg Hood in a book entitled, "Giving that Feels Good."

Motivation #1 - Guilt

This is "have to" giving. People give because they have to give, the plate comes around, the special collection is announced and they give because they feel guilty if they do not. Of course, guilt is a strong motivator and draws money from those who would not otherwise give, however it is not a biblical motive that is listed in the Scriptures as an acceptable frame of mind for one to offer something to God.

Paul says in II Corinthians 9:7 that we should be "cheerful givers," happy to give and not motivated to do so out of guilt or shame. Giving out of guilt may help the church raise money, but it does not help the individual mature spiritually away from materialism, selfishness or worldliness, and it does not provide him with the joy that normally accompanies the act of giving.

Motivation #2 - Responsibility

This is the "ought to" give syndrome. It is the legalist's or the perfectionist's approach to giving. For example, this person might think the following, "giving is good and biblical, so I ought to do this, it's my responsibility as a Christian."

Again, the church gets money, but usually not a whole lot because a legalist's approach is to give what is strictly necessary or basic. Studies on the giving patterns of the local congregation indicate that 80 percent of the regular Sunday collection/offering is contributed by approximately 20 percent of the church members (the cheerful givers), 18 percent of each Sunday's offering is contributed by 30 percent of its members (the legalists) and the last 2 percent of the collection amount is provided by the remaining 50 percent of the congregation (those whose words concerning their faith are not supported by their actions concerning that said faith when it comes to giving).

The responsible motivation is better than the guilt motivation but again, it limits the amount of giving and the true rewards that come from properly motivated giving which is joy and satisfaction. Actually, the responsibility motivation may lead to pride or complacency because the thinking eventually becomes, "Well, I have done my part, no need to do more."

Motivation #3 - Need

I give because I *want* to give. God wants us to be concerned about meeting needs.

In II Corinthians 8:13-15 Paul says God provides us what we have so we can provide for the needs of others. Knowing that there is a need often kindles a desire in us to do something about it. This is the motivation level that most of us are at. We see a need, we want to take care of it. This type of giving is satisfying and does not rely on guilt or compulsion to act out, but rather flows from a genuine Christian spirit. It also leads to sacrificial giving and motivates others to give. Many times it is a way

to raise money from those who do not normally give because they only do so unless they see a true need.

The downside of this motivation is that when these people do not see or agree with the need they refuse to give. In the end, this type of motivation is not the most effective because it is primarily centered in self, "I will give for something I see or something I can relate to."

Motivation #4 - Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is an "outflow" type of giving. It is the "I give because I cannot help giving" attitude and a way of saying, "Thank you" to God for all He has done for you. Paul said that his ministry was a reaction to all that God had done for him (I Corinthians 15:10). What Jesus in the gospel has done for you, what the Holy Spirit is doing inside of you, what the church has done for you makes you feel grateful to the point where you are motivated to give back. This type of giving impresses people outside of the church and thus is evangelistic in nature. It also motivates and leads others in the church to not only give, but be thankful in their giving.

The only weakness with this motivation is that our giving is tied to our thankfulness. If we truly appreciate the Lord, our giving is right. If, on the other hand, we do not see or appreciate the nature of our blessings, our giving then reflects this lack of understanding.

Motivation #5 - Worship

Giving becomes worship when it flows out of one's personal relationship with God. When one's financial decisions are a result of prayer and fellowship with the Lord, it is a sign that our financial stewardship is directed by our spiritual life and not physical or material calculations which, in even the best of times, are really a form of wisdom from below. When everything we do is part of giving to God, we then approach the status described by Paul in Romans 12:1 where he says that we should,

...present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- Romans 12:1

When one sees the giving of money in the same light as giving their confession of Christ, giving their trust in God, giving their lives over to His care; when our financial giving becomes a part of our spiritual relationship with God, then giving becomes worship. It is motivated by a desire to honor God. There are no downsides here. The motivation is God centered, it brings joy to the giver and the church is blessed by the sacrificial giving of one of its members.

There is one other motivation for giving not mentioned by Dr. Hood but included in the Bible. It is a motivation that we cannot provide for ourselves but is given to us as a gift.

Motivation #6 - Holy Spirit

Sometimes, if we are truly blessed, the Holy Spirit will grant us the gift of liberality (Romans 12:6-8). This gift is one where the Spirit enables a person to give without fault; to seek out opportunities to give; to yearn for more resources with the sole purpose of having an opportunity of exercising this particular spiritual gift.

The Spirit as direct motivator enables one to give graciously, abundantly, regularly and without fear, pride or reservation. While for most of us giving is a struggle, a narrow road or a challenge to overcome our flesh, the one with the "gift" finds it natural, easy, joyful and exciting to reach new levels of generosity. There are always a few people in each congregation who possess this gift but would genuinely be embarrassed if their names were mentioned in this context, and this only proves the genuineness of the special gift they possess from God.

I believe that God provides different gifts to different ones in order to inspire us all and to provide the church with spiritual goals to strive for in our maturation process. We would, therefore, do well to pray that the Lord bless us with this gift or bless the ones who have this gift with abundant resources so they can use them to the church's advantage.

SUMMARY

If you are willing for the teaching you have just received to have a true spiritual impact on your life today, here are some specific things you can do in order to turn it from simply being a set of ideas to believe and approve of to becoming a plan for personal transformation:

- Determine what your giving motivation has been.
- Choose a motivational goal and ask God to lead you to it using whatever method that will succeed.
- Finish reading this book on Successful Stewardship with the view that you will become a better steward of the resources that God has provided for your management.

2. What About Tithing?

In this book I am reviewing various concepts related to Christian stewardship. In the previous chapter I spoke about motivation and the role that it plays in our giving to the Lord. In this chapter I would like to consider the matter of tithing and clear up some misconceptions we may have about this practice and then examine some of the teachings found in the New Testament about giving to the Lord.

In the previous chapter I focused on the various reasons we give, this time I want to explain how we, as Christians, give.

TITHING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Many denominations use the word "tithing" when they refer to the giving of money to the church. This word refers to the Old Testament practice of giving one tenth of the Jewish people's produce and livestock to support the priests and Levites in their work at the temple, and ministry on behalf of the nation. The word "tithe" literally means 1/10, and so tithing is the giving of a one tenth share of something.

Tithing, as a religious obligation, is older than the Law of Moses and was observed by many nations long before it was introduced into Jewish culture. For example, in Genesis 14:17-20 various pagan kings gave Abraham one tenth of their spoils of war for having saved their people in a battle against several of the regional powers of that day.

When the Law was given by Moses, this concept was included as a way of supporting the Levites and the priests who served the spiritual needs of the people. In the book of Joshua chapters 13-21, we read that Joshua divided the land given to the Jews by God (called Canaan at the time) and assigned each tribe their portion of territory. The tribe of Levi (from which came the Levites), however, had no land inheritance and instead were given the responsibility of caring for the Tent of Meeting (the place where Jewish animal, food and drink sacrifices were prepared and offered) and later care for the Temple, built for this same purpose, in the city of Jerusalem. Their livelihood, therefore, came from the tithe of produce and animals given by the nation. The priests also lived in this way. The Levites received a tenth of the produce and animals offered in sacrifice by the people and they, in turn, gave a tenth of what they received to the priests thereby maintaining their own and the priests' livelihood in this way.

The people were instructed to count out one tenth of their crops, fruit, and herds and give it to the Levites; this was done three times a year. Later on, zealous scribes and Pharisees added complex rules demanding that even seasonings had to be tithed, down to stalks and leaves (but this was human law, not Mosaic Law). The Pharisees said that everything that was eaten, watched over or grown had to be tithed. This, of course, was the type of excess that Jesus accused them of when He said,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

- Matthew 23:23

Because the Jews gave significant meaning to different numbers, one tenth or 10 percent was an important symbolic portion offered to the Lord. The number ten represented wholeness, fulfillment, ripeness, readiness, or completeness. Therefore, 10 percent was a mature, complete, and full offering to the Lord. The idea was that your gift, your thanks, your offering was itself complete, mature, and whole because when you gave a tenth you knew you had given what God had commanded and did not second guess yourself in the practice of giving.

THE MEANING OF THE GIFT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The fact that the Jews gave the first 10 percent portion of their crops, fruit, herds (which represented their wealth) was done to signify an important idea.

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;
- Exodus 19:5

The point here was that they had no natural right to use or consume anything since it all belonged to God. The point of giving the first 10 percent to God was a way of signifying that everything they had belonged to Him and the portion given acknowledged this truth or reality. The Jews understood that by giving the first full portion (10 percent) to God and thus acknowledging His ownership, God was permitting and blessing them in the use and disposal of the remaining ninety percent. The point was that all the produce and herds should have been given to God because it rightfully belonged to Him, but by giving Him the first full portion (10 percent was considered a full portion and thus eliminated doubt as to what a proper and acceptable portion should be) God gave back the remaining 90 percent and blessed them in its use.

TITHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are many religious groups and denominations who have carried over the idea of tithing into the present time. There are even some Churches of Christ who carry on this practice. They may be well meaning but they have no New Testament basis to support this practice. The concepts of giving, giving regularly, generously, even sacrificially have all been carried over from the Old Testament to the New Testament, but the requirement that each individual's acceptable portion must be 10 percent has not.

Some people confuse pledging and tithing:

- **Pledging** occurs when a member of the church examines his resources and pledges/promises to provide the church a certain amount of money over a period of time. Of course, this is done with the understanding that keeping the commitment is based on whether or not the Lord will continue to provide life and resources. "*If the Lord is willing,*" a certain amount will be given over a certain period of time. This type of giving helps the person and the church plan their work and financial commitments. Some are against pledging as a way of giving because they do not see it practiced in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 16:2, however, Paul tells the church to prepare and set aside an amount for a certain purpose and day. This was a form of pledging in the early church. Some are even against the use of pledge cards, but again, this is just another way of organizing our giving, work, and budgeting.
- **Tithing** on the other hand, is a requirement that each person must give a certain amount to the Lord. There is no choice, not to do so is a sin. Tithing is easier and more profitable for the budget but cannot be supported by any Scripture, example or inference in the New Testament.

There is still giving in the New Testament, but the way we give and some of the reasons we do so are different.

NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON GIVING

As far as "how" one should give, the New Testament has a much more simplified approach to the actual giving itself. I Corinthians 16:2 teaches us the "how to" of New Testament giving:

On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.
- I Corinthians 16:2

1. We give regularly (first day of the week).

The church provides a convenient time for monies to be collected during the weekly worship period on Sunday. Paul, in this passage, is speaking about a special offering he was collecting for the saints in Jerusalem, but in so doing he provides the only information we have concerning the "method" used to collect funds in the church. One instruction and example in the Bible is enough, however, to guide our actions today.

2. Each one gives.

Every single member is responsible for giving. There is no such thing as a Christian who feels that he or she is not included in this process. If you have income of any kind, on the first day of each week, you should be giving to the Lord.

3. Each person prepares his or her offering.

No one tells you what to give. No one dictates the amount, this is your decision. However, Paul says that it is not a last minute thing or an afterthought. Each person should come with the intention of giving and giving an amount that has been thought about and prepared in advance.

4. Give according to what you have received.

In the Old Testament the Law said that the Jews had to offer 10 percent of their harvest and herds whether there were good or bad times. This

limited them in a way because 10 percent of a little was not a lot, and when they had a lot, 10 percent was not much for them to give. In the New Testament, Jesus frees us to give generously at all times by tying our giving to our appreciation of what we have. For example, a poor man may feel he is truly blessed because of his family and good health and wants to give the Lord a generous portion of what little he owns to show his gratitude, an amount which may be quite generous in proportion to what he actually possesses. A rich man, on the other hand, is free to give in excess of 10 percent so that his giving is both meaningful and sacrificial (he feels it). 10 percent would be the required amount offered (according to Old Testament teaching), but for the rich it would not be a sacrificial amount. Jesus' teaching helps us deal with the ups and downs of life. In good years if we offered 25 percent of our wealth we might still have plenty left to live on comfortably. However, when personal disaster happened it might be that five percent would be the most we could give based on what we had. The New Testament enables us to grow in good as well as bad times with regards to our giving.

The rest of this passage shows that in the matter of money great care was given that the collection was well accounted for by several in the congregation. It also demonstrates that it was spent on specific needs of the church for ministry (e.g. we see in Acts - to evangelize, to provide for the poor and widows, to enable the work of the ministers).

In addition to this Jesus taught that when it came to giving, discretion should be the order of the day, not the time for a show.

But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know
what your right hand is doing,
- Matthew 6:3

There are other teachings about giving as far as attitude and the benefits of giving, but in this section I merely wanted to look at the "how to" of giving:

1. On the first day
2. Each person gives
3. A prepared amount
4. Tied to our gratitude and wealth, not Law

SUMMARY

In the New Testament church, therefore, when it comes to the giving of money, we see several concrete teachings about this subject. As Christians we follow and do what we have been taught, and eliminate all other things, this is why we do not have bake sales or raffles to raise money for church use. It isn't because the New Testament says these type of activities are sinful. We eschew these money-making activities because the New Testament provides us with clear teachings and commands about what we ought to be doing in this area of our Christian service. When the Bible tells us what and how to do something, this eliminates all other options. In other words, the teaching of what we are to do eliminates man-made options that have no basis in Scripture.

Every week, therefore, each of us contributes a portion of our means according to our wealth. We give it freely and cheerfully and once given it is the responsibility of the church to use it wisely for the work of the Lord. This is the simple teaching of Christ and the Apostles to the church on the matter of Christian giving which we are to faithfully follow.

3.

A Practical Plan for Generous Giving

Before I go into the material at hand, I want us to understand that the term "stewardship," in the Bible, is not simply another word for the giving of money. To be a steward means to have a position of responsibility, to be a good manager of someone else's goods as well as your own. A good steward, therefore, knows how to handle money, whether it is his own or it belongs to someone else.

In the previous chapters we reviewed the motivation for giving as well as the manner in which we give. In this chapter I would like to examine how we, as good stewards, are to plan for the various opportunities that God regularly places before us in order to challenge our giving.

PROPER RESPONSE OF A STEWARD

If you were a V.P. or a manager in a company, or a supervisor at a plant or federal/state agency and your superior called you in and laid before you a job, contract, goal or objective of some kind, what would your response be? In other words, if you were a contractor, independent businessman, tradesman or one who provides a service of some kind and were faced with a new job, client or project, how would you react?

Would you pout and stamp your foot? Would you groan and complain and try to find a way to avoid the task? Of course, if you had made it to the point of being a manager, successful businessman or vice president of some organization you would undoubtedly know that pouting or complaining was not the proper attitude to have when presented with a new challenge or task.

In many ways stewards are God's V.P.s, His managers, His supervisors who maintain and distribute His resources. The difference between the world and the church in this regard is that in the church everyone is a steward, not just a few. When God presents us with a challenge, a goal, an objective, or a job to do we need to respond like good stewards, not bad ones who complain, try to duck the responsibility or agree to go ahead but do so with a sigh and a negative attitude. A good steward will see the task ahead, the challenge or the call and will respond with a willingness to serve and a desire to succeed in ministry to the Lord.

PRACTICAL PLAN FOR GENEROUS GIVING

Many times when the church raises money for costly but necessary projects (e.g. replacing the roof on a church's building, etc.) the objective needs to be viewed not simply as the need to raise a large amount of money. The objective should also be seen as a way to encourage every steward (each person in the church) to view the project as a personal opportunity to improve their ministry of giving (Romans 12:8 - liberality). Simply announcing a large number from the pulpit depersonalizes the exercise in giving and thus renders it too distant as an objective for a single individual. This is why the objective for each person (who is a steward) must become more reachable, more tangible. When the focus is removed from the corporate goal (e.g. \$450,000 is the cost to replace an outdated and leaky roof) and centered on the personal challenge to give more generously in this instance than in similar situations when called upon in the past, then we are calling upon the individuals in the church to respond with a steward's heart no matter what the project or its cost. This "steward's heart" that I speak of is developed when we do the following five things:

1. Think Like Stewards

We need to understand how things work in the kingdom when it comes to wealth. We need to learn how to think and see things like one who is a steward in the Lord's church. For example:

A. We need to realize that God owns everything and what we have, we have because of Him (rich or poor).

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

- I Timothy 6:17

B. Our role as stewards is to manage what He has provided and give God glory with its use. The basic distribution could be described in the following three categories:

If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

- I Timothy 6:8

1. Devote the first portion of what we receive to the Lord (e.g. offering towards the work of the church).
2. Devote the next portion of what we receive for our own use in maintaining Christian homes and families in an unbelieving world.
3. Devote the balance of what we receive for the maintenance of an orderly society (taxes, etc.).

If this is our mindset, we are thinking like stewards and not like worldly-minded unbelievers who think...

- That all they have or own is the result of their efforts.

- That their wealth is to be used to purchase their own comfort and security.
- That "giving" is a favor they do for the Lord and not a basic responsibility.

When we begin thinking like stewards, however, it affects not only our handling of money but also influences every aspect of our lives. For example:

- A. We gain a new spiritual balance and poise. If our income is down, then as stewards we trust God and wait for Him to provide as we continue to serve Him with what we have (II Corinthians 8:12). If our income is up, we rejoice and serve Him faithfully without pride or greed (Deuteronomy 8:18).
- B. We avoid becoming materialistic. If we know that God is the owner and source of all, we want to please Him with our management of wealth and not give in to purely selfish desires. As stewards we are more concerned about unnecessary debt than a lessening of income. Some Christians are so in debt for frivolous or overly expensive things that they have nothing left with which to serve and glorify God. If we foolishly use up all of the resources we have been blessed with, we will then lack the wherewithal to properly serve and honor the One who provides these resources in the first place.
- C. Stewardship mentality helps us in the way we spend the money we do have. Good and faithful stewards always consider the effect on God's Kingdom that their lifestyle and purchases are going to have. If we are going to act and give like good stewards of God's blessings, we have to begin to think like stewards and not like unbelievers who only think of themselves and this world.

2. Act Like a Trusted Manager

Psychologists tell us that the way to change behavior is to change thinking. If you begin thinking like a steward, it will not be long before you begin acting like a steward. Our actions as trusted managers will be noticeable because the Bible describes how we, as trusted managers, should act:

1. Our giving will follow the pattern set down by the Bible. The pattern for giving found in I Corinthians 16:2 that I explained previously in this book.
 - a. Regular giving - each first day.
 - b. Personal giving - a personal responsibility.
 - c. Prepared giving - an amount previously decided.
 - d. Proportional giving - in relation to our blessings.
 - e. Good Stewards are careful about their giving because they know that it is a mark of their stewardship.
2. We will consider the welfare of the church as a personal responsibility. True stewards have a sense of "ownership" concerning the church and thus feel a burden of personal responsibility for its well-being and growth. A good steward does not think that the church belongs to the preacher or elders and they themselves are only visiting. A good steward wants not only financial accountability from church leaders, but also desires to fulfill his own responsibilities in making sure that the church is financially stable and equipped to fulfill its role in bringing the gospel to its community and the world.

...So, if we want to create a steward's plan for generous giving we must think like a steward, act like a steward, and...

3. Feel Like a Precious Heir

If we understand that our role as stewards is preparing us for future blessings we will be able to give generously, cheerfully and share the burden for church growth. God does not need our money or our help but He does accept it because He is trying to teach and bless us through this activity. This teaching includes the following:

1. Good stewards learn to trust in God and not in themselves or material things. There is great joy, peace and satisfaction that comes to a person who has learned to trust in God, as stewards must do.
2. Good stewards become witnesses of God's providence. Only through effective stewardship do we become aware of how God works in our lives and the lives of others, and this builds our faith and hope.
3. Good stewards themselves experience more perfectly and fully the wonder of God's grace. When we have given up focusing only on self, spending exclusively on self or serving only our own needs and begin to live as God's stewards, we will experience His care for all of life's needs. This will reveal one of the spiritual life's most important lessons: Where your strength ends, His begins to be revealed (II Corinthians 12:9).

Stewards are being prepared for the day when they will sit on the right hand of God to reign with Christ as stewards. We should not groan or try to avoid our stewardship role here on earth because we are being prepared for a far greater role as God's stewards in the future.

4.

Principles of the Plate

In this short book we have reviewed several ideas about Christian stewardship, primarily that stewardship is the care and management of someone else's property. In our case as Christians, we are responsible for managing and distributing the wealth God has given to us.

In lesson number:

1. We talked about motivation. What motivates our giving as good stewards (not guilt or pride, but the Holy Spirit).
2. We studied tithing, the Old Testament method of giving and reviewed the teaching in the New Testament about "how" we should give.
3. I showed you a plan for good stewardship. In it we learned how we, as Christians, could become good stewards regarding the management of our resources (think, act and feel like stewards).

4. In this final chapter I would like to review several fundamental principles about giving that transcend culture and time. These truths about giving are valid at all times, and I refer to them as, "The Principles of the Plate."

Principle of the Plate #1

The More You Give the More You Get

The Bible is filled with basic principles that guide our lives and that are true in every generation and culture. One of these is the principle of increased return. In other words, you cannot out give God!

In the prophet Malachi's day (400 BC), the Jewish people had forgotten this idea and were cutting back on their giving and offering inferior sacrifices to God in order to cut corners. In his book, the prophet Malachi reminds them that in doing this they were actually robbing themselves of potential blessings.

⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.

- Malachi 3:9-10

In the New Testament, Jesus reinforces this idea of increased return:

Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

- Luke 6:38

Giving is an expression of faith. The believer says, "I believe enough in what I do not see to give up some of what I do see." Some people think that the more you give, the more of the same (money, health, success,

etc.) you will get. This is true to a certain extent, generosity begets generosity, but the true reward of giving is that the more you give up of what you see, the better able you become in seeing the One who is hidden.

Principle of the Plate #2

It is More Blessed to Give than to Receive

In Acts 20:35, Paul quotes a saying of Jesus that is not recorded in the gospels but could have quite easily fit in the Sermon on the Mount. The suggestion here is that taking is pleasurable in its own right:

- It feels good to receive.
- It builds our esteem to be given gifts.
- It is easy to receive, and profitable for the one who is receiving.

Like all beatitudes, this passage reveals a truth about the workings of the Kingdom of God not easily seen by the unbeliever or the casual observer.

As far as giving is concerned:

- It feels better than the feeling experienced when receiving.
- Giving builds our souls in a way receiving cannot.
- Although difficult, inconvenient and sacrificial at times, giving is much more profitable than receiving.
 - Two people are profited, the giver and the receiver benefit.
 - Giving pleases God thus gives joy to the giver in affirming the fact that he is doing what is right.

- Giving guards the soul against greed (giving is the antidote to the poison of envy).
- And as Paul says, giving puts us into the Spirit of Christ who came to give His life, not save it.

I think that people who do not give at church, or anywhere else for that matter, are denying themselves a pleasure and joy that would free them from fear, jealousy and selfishness as well as the misery that comes with these attitudes. Have we ever noticed that "giving" people are usually "happy" people?

Principle of the Plate #3

God Provides for your Giving

The ironic thing about giving is that we never give what is ours anyways. Whatever we have, God has freely and cheerfully given it to us in the first place. All of it!

¹⁰ So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ¹¹ Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. ¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. ¹⁴ "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.

- I Chronicles 29:10-14

The fact that people do not acknowledge this or rarely give or give very little does not change this basic truth. Paul expresses this principle in II Corinthians:

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

- II Corinthians 9:8-11

This is not just a passing comment, it is an explanation of how God works, how this business of giving operates from God's perspective. Pay attention to how this system functions:

1. God is able to provide everything you need (material, emotional, spiritual). He is the source for all things (verse 8).
2. Not only will He provide for your needs, He will also provide for your giving (verse 8b).
3. God will take care of you and give you an abundance so that once your needs are cared for you can glorify Him and bless yourself by the doing of good deeds and supplying other people's needs.

The problem is that we always invest our extra income, our extra talents, our extra time into ourselves. The sin here is that instead of using what God has entrusted to us for the service of others, we use it in the pursuit of our own comfort and pleasure. The Bible assures us that God can and will provide for everything we need to live (money, food, family, leisure, etc.) but it also instructs us to recognize the fact that not all of what we have is solely for us. Some of it has been given to us so that we may bless others in God's name (thus glorifying Him) and one day God will require an accounting of our stewardship from us.

Thing brings me to...

Principle of the Plate #4

We will be Judged Concerning our Giving

Some may say, "We are saved by faith in Christ, not by how much we give. That is salvation by works!" The Bible says:

But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

- James 2:18

My faith in Christ must be expressed somehow and Jesus tells us that it is expressed or shown to be genuine in a variety of ways.

1. In Mark 16:16, He says that if you believe you will be baptized. So baptism is an expression of my faith.
2. In John 14:23, He says that if you love Him you will obey His word. So obedience is an expression of my faith.
3. In Matthew 25:31-46, He says that when He returns, the disciples He will take to heaven are those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned, not the ones who only believed that He was the Son of God but did nothing about it except to listen to sermons about this basic truth.

It is not that giving replaces faith or that much giving can pay for Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, that is priceless. Giving is a barometer of our faith. It registers how strong or weak our faith really is because it measures our deeds not just our words.

Principle of the Plate #5

Giving Determines the Growth of the Church

In the book of Acts we watch the explosive growth of the church in Jerusalem in the first century. Note that this growth was fueled by two main factors:

1. The preaching and miracles done by the Apostles.
2. The tremendous generosity of the church.

⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need

- Acts 2:43-45

³² And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- Acts 4:32-37

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

- Acts 6:1

The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

- Acts 6:7

Preaching without giving does not produce growth because growth requires service and services need resources. Giving without preaching will not lead to growth because the Word is what converts, not the money. You need solid preaching yoked together with sacrificial giving in order to produce dynamic church growth.

SUMMARY

Pressing on to maturity in the area of giving requires us to understand and implement these "plate principles."

1. The more you give away the greater your blessing from God - try it!
2. Giving provides certain rewards that receiving cannot - experience them!
3. God gives to you so you can give to others and receive a blessing - identify His portion and give it regularly.
4. Judgment and giving are related - be careful. How will you be judged?
5. Growth and giving are also related - everyone in the church affects its growth by their giving or not giving - if a member of

the church does not regularly give time, money or talent, then they are moving the church backwards not forwards.

My hope is that this small book has encouraged you to see yourself not only as a disciple but also a steward of God's many blessings. God bless you in the management of His wealth.

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