

Generosity

The Biblical take on giving

In the Old Testament there are laws about tithes and offerings; the New Testament does not discount those but focuses much more on the heart. Giving has been, and still is, a strong part of our culture and takes many forms – charity, patronage, philanthropy, corporate sponsorship, scholarships, etc. Giving may be seen as a duty or an obligation, but generosity is an attitude. Giving is also at its most pure when it is not motivated by seeking something in return.



Pray for clarity to see whatever God wants to reveal to you during this study.



Discuss together:
How much is generosity a spontaneous act and how much is it a considered decision?

Frequently we are encouraged to donate to worthy causes; those requests coming through TV advertisements, telephone calls, mail drops, street appeals, buskers, etc.



- When you receive a request, do you?: (tick as many as apply)
- a. Make a snap decision to give, or not, to that cause
 - b. Defer making an instant decision
 - c. Give a little to avoid embarrassment
 - d. Feel irritated and put upon
 - e. Feel guilty at saying "no"
 - f. Give, but feel afterwards that you wished you hadn't
 - g. Ignore it because of 'donor fatigue' at so many causes
 - h. Other ...

Share your responses in the group.

A Cycle of Giving

Read: Numbers 18: 21 – 24
Deuteronomy 12: 6 – 7
Deuteronomy 14: 22 – 29
Deuteronomy 26: 12 – 15

What were the purposes of the tithe?

What does Deuteronomy 14: 29 suggest about a cycle of giving and receiving?

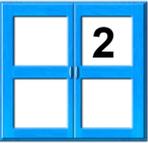
We give or contribute to the meeting of needs that are beyond our own personal needs through:

- taxes
- giving to the church
- giving to other charitable purposes
- personal financial support of others

For each of these consider the nature and purpose of that giving and also the relationship between these different forms of giving.

Tithing (Giving 10% of income) is a common practice for Christians. Tithing is particularly stressed in some churches. Tick as many of the following statements on tithing as you agree with, then discuss in the group.

- All Christians should tithe
- Tithing is a useful guideline for giving
- Tithing is legalistic & no longer relevant
- Tithing is appropriate but not a set %
- 10% is a minimum to give
- 10% is a maximum to give
- A Christian's first call on giving is to the church, then elsewhere
- How & where a Christian gives is between that person and God
- Taxation covers some of what a tithe used to cover
- It is unethical for a church to pressure members to tithe
- Other thoughts you have on tithing:



Aspects of Giving

What do each of these passages tell us about the nature of giving?

Matthew 5: 42 _____

Matthew 6: 1 – 4 _____

Luke 21: 1 – 4 _____

Acts 20: 32 – 35 _____

1 Corinthians 13: 3 _____

Generosity is not just about giving money but also about how we use or share the things we own, how we use our time, and how we value other people.

If we are to have a generous attitude, how will that be seen in how we use what we have?

If we are to have a generous attitude, how will that be seen in the way we use our time?

If we are to have a generous attitude, how will that be seen in the way we treat others and speak of others?

If people are to give, then others are to receive. How difficult can it be to receive?

Romans 12: 1 – 8 includes giving in a list of 'spiritual gifts'. What does it mean for giving to be a spiritual gift?

How does this differ from the giving and generosity that all Christians are called to?



A Case Study on Giving

The Apostle Paul organised a collection from the churches that he was in contact with throughout the Province of Asia to be sent to Jerusalem to help the church members there in a time of famine.

Read the following passages to get familiar with that fundraising event:

Acts 11: 27 – 30

1 Corinthians 16: 1 – 4

2 Corinthians 8: 1 – 9: 15

Do Christians have a special duty to support other Christian believers who are in difficult times?
(E.g. The Barnabas Fund – an organization that specifically offers support to Christians enduring persecution).

The Collection for Jerusalem was administered by Paul and Barnabas. How important is it that charitable funds are administered in a transparent, efficient and ordered way? NB 2 Cor. 8: 18 – 21

1 Cor. 16: 2 suggests the weekly setting aside of donations. How helpful or important is it that giving becomes a regular discipline?

2 Cor. 8: 1 – 4 speaks of the Macedonians giving out of their own poverty. How important is it that even those who are in need also maintain a generous spirit?

2 Cor 8: 8 – 15 What lessons on giving are found in these verses?

2 Cor. 9: 6 – 15 Also list the principles on giving and generosity found in this passage.

For Christians, how important is thanksgiving to God as a motivation for our generosity?

Does that make Christian giving different to the generosity found in others?



What has this study revealed about the nature of God?



What new thought or understanding has come to you during this study?



What issues, questions or practical implications for your local church, your church denomination, or the wider Christian church, are raised by this study?



(This section may be used for personal reflection alone or may be shared within the group)

List the amounts that you give to charitable causes or to support other people:

What proportion of your income do you give away?

In what other ways do you give of yourself to others?



Spend some time as a group praying over what you have discussed, asking God to bring into focus how you may respond to his Word in an ongoing way.



More Bible passages and discussion questions for further study:

The Church (as an institution) is in the unusual situation of both depending on the giving of people in order to survive while also being a contributor to many causes.

How should the church go about generating financial support at parish level?

How should the diocese approach obtaining funds for its activities?

Should the church donate to other causes or leave that to the individual to do?

Genesis 4: 1 – 16 Cain and Abel.

Cain and Abel both gave offerings to God. Abel's was accepted, Cain's was not. Why?

What might make giving by Christians acceptable or not acceptable to God?



Notes on some of the passages referred to in this study:

Numbers 18: 21 – 24 The Levites were one of the 12 tribes of Israel. They were dedicated to the carrying out the ceremonial and practical tasks to do with worship and the sacrificial system. Levites also had role in the judicial system and in teaching. The Levites did not receive an allocation of land, as did the other tribes, when the people of Israel entered the Promised Land. Therefore the Levites could not produce food for themselves. Deuteronomy 18: 1 – 8 gives further detail on the Levites.

Deuteronomy 12: 6 – 7 This passage gives a summary of the various types of offerings that the people of Israel were expected to make to the Lord. Deuteronomy 14: 22 – 29 and Deuteronomy 26: 12 – 15 give further detail. These passages form part of the large body of material in Deuteronomy (as well as in Leviticus and Numbers) that contains various instructions and regulations that the people of Israel were expected to follow in their religious observance. Generally speaking, Christians no longer observe the letter of the law, especially in the matter of the sacrificial system; however Christians do respect the ethical values of the law. When it comes to the laws regarding the giving of tithes, offerings and sacrifices, there is debate about what details still apply and what principles are to be followed. As in all matters of the law, we look to the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament to inform our understanding.

Matthew 5: 42 is found in what we refer to as Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount', in chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew. These chapters contain much of the moral teaching of Jesus. Often this teaching of Jesus goes beyond the mere letter of the Old Testament law, getting to the spirit of what God requires.

Matthew 6: 1 – 4 This passage is also part of the 'Sermon on the Mount'.

Luke 21: 1 – 4 People contributed to the costs of running the temple by placing amounts into trumpet-shaped receptacles. This appears to have been quite a public act, with a temple officer often counting the contributions that were made.

Acts 20: 32 – 35 Refer to the note in a previous study about Paul's tent-making work, through which he was self-sufficient. Paul appears to have also been generous himself in his support of others. Verse 35 contains the only record that we have of this particular saying that is attributed to Jesus.

1 Corinthians 13: 3 The middle part of this verse is variously translated as 'giving over my body to hardship' or 'giving my body over to the flames' - this could be a reference to martyrdom or persecution. The latter part of the verse is helpful in thinking about the motivation behind any sort of giving.

Acts 11: 27 – 30, 1 Corinthians 16: 1 – 4, and 2 Corinthians 8: 1 – 9: 15 all relate to a collection encouraged by Paul and others for famine relief for the Christians in Jerusalem. This was begun on the strength of a prophetic word that was given which predicted the famine. Paul valued the gift of prophecy and encouraged it. Agabus, who gave this particular prophecy, also (in Acts 21: 10 – 11) prophesied the later arrest of Paul. According to the historian Josephus a famine did take place in AD 46. The churches that supported this appeal were in the Roman Province of Asia (that is the area around what we now refer to as Turkey, not the continent of Asia).

Genesis 4: 1 – 16 There are many speculations made as to why Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's was not; such as: that it was not a blood sacrifice, or that it was not of his firstfruits, or that it was not burnt up in the appropriate way. It may be that it was a matter of the heart or attitude with which the offering was made, rather than what or how it was made. Although we have no firm answer to what the fault was with Cain's offering, nevertheless, it provides a helpful discussion starter for debate on what makes giving by Christians acceptable or unacceptable to the Lord.