Making Disciples that Delight in the Supremacy of Jesus Christ

Giving: Theology & Practice

The gospel ministry of Restoration Church is sustained by the generosity of its members. Financial support given to our church provides resources to strengthen us in the gospel and equip us to advance the gospel into Washington, DC and beyond. Our desire is to provide a brief biblical and theological perspective on giving so that each person might have a richer understanding of giving and a deeper appreciation for the generosity in their own lives and the lives of their fellow church members.

Why We Should Give

The proper starting place for developing theology for giving is to ask the simple yet profound question of “Why should I give?” First, we give because of the sheer splendor and greatness of our God. In giving we act actively proclaim that we treasure the riches of Jesus as being more valuable than the things of this world. Like the man who joyfully gives up all he has because he understands the surpassing treasure found in God’s kingdom (cf. Mt. 13:44), we give as an act of worship delighting in the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Second, we also give because we are image bearers of God, who himself is a giver. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and we have nothing that we have not received (cf. Js 1:17; 1 Cor. 4:7). So every time we give we recognize all things come from God and resemble the God who created us in His own image and likeness (cf. Gn. 1:26-28).

One of God’s gifts far exceeds all the others; this points us to a third reason we give – because of the radical generosity displayed for us in the gospel. John 3:16 reminds us of the greatest gift God could ever give us, his only Son.

God gave his only Son, Jesus, so that we might have eternal life. This character of generosity is reflected in Jesus himself as he willingly laid down his life for us (cf. Jn. 10:18); though he was rich with the glories of heaven, he put on the rags of earth that we might be reconciled back to God the Father (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). Both God the Father and God the Son exude generosity in giving us God the Spirit, who himself gives us his very indwelling presence.

God the Father is a giver who gave us his Son. Jesus is a giver who gives us new life that we might delight in Jesus Christ to the glory of God. We give in worshipful response to God because of the good news that He first gave to us.

Fourth, we give because God promises blessings to those who are generous (cf. Lk. 6:38). When we sow generously, we should expect to reap generously (cf. 2 Cor. 9:7-8; Gal. 6:7-8). This does not mean we will receive numerous material possessions. The blessings referenced here are sometimes specifically referenced as treasure in heaven, and other times they are simply called blessings. But what is clear is that if we give we will be blessed – that is, be in the place of God’s favor. We give because there is reward for those who do, and seeking that reward is a godly motivation for giving.

Finally, we give because that’s the biblical pattern.¹ Throughout the entirety of the Bible, God’s people give money and material resources to support God’s mission. Today it’s no different – God uses the

¹ The sections below spell this biblical pattern out in more detail.
generosity of His people to support the local church as it advances the gospel into the lives of believers and unbelievers alike.

So we give to show the surpassing worth of God, and in doing so we demonstrate the character of our Creator and show our appreciation for the radical generosity he has displayed for us in Jesus. Following the biblical pattern set before us, we give expectant of the blessings God pours out on those who are generous.

**What We Should Give**

Perhaps the second most pressing question is “What should I give?” Notice the question – what should I give. The question is not how much money should I give. God owns all of us (cf. Romans 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:31). Money is just one thing that we give and until we understand that God owns everything we will not live lives completely marked by generosity, both monetarily and otherwise. With that said, let’s begin to focus on what we should give regarding money.

Before giving some specifics, let’s discuss two extremes we need to avoid. The first extreme says that no matter what, for every person in every circumstance, God wants you to give a certain percentage of your money, usually 10%, and after that you can do whatever you want with your money. The danger with this approach is that it sets giving to be merely a duty to be fulfilled rather than an act of worship to be enjoyed. Taking this approach acts as if you ‘owe’ God a certain percentage and then the rest is yours.

The other extreme says that no matter what you are currently giving you should be giving more. Whereas the first extreme motivates you to give based on duty, this position compels you to give out of guilt. God does not want us to give begrudgingly and out of compulsion, but joyfully (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). A proper theology of giving should not always leave us with a guilty feeling of “I should be giving more.”

So with those two extremes in mind, what should we give? Throughout the Old Testament God’s people were commanded to give upwards of 25% of their income and material goods each year. Surprisingly, the New Testament gives no such percentage requirement regarding our giving. Rather, the repeated theme is that we should give liberally and sacrificially and proportionately. In 2 Corinthians 8-9 we find several instructive statements on giving: “according to their means…beyond their means” (8:3); “out of what you have” (8:11); “according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have” (8:12); “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (9:6). People with greater wealth should give more than those with less; however, both should be generous and sacrificial in their giving (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2).

Our goal is not to tell you exactly how much to give – that’s up to each person. A heart captivated by the generosity of the gospel longs to be generous toward God and his people, often leading to giving more than 10% - but that’s not a legalistic standard. Ultimately, the question you have to ask yourself is, “Am I being generous and sacrificial in my giving?” Remember, everything rightly belongs to God so we are not asking “How much of my money should I give to God?” but rather we are asking, “How much of God’s money should I keep?”

---

2 In the Old Testament God commanded a practice of giving that included an annual “Levitical” tithe (cf. Lv. 27:30-34), an annual “Festival” tithe (cf. Dt. 12:11-12; 14:22-27), and a triennial “Poor” tithe (cf. Dt. 14:28-29; 26:12). So each family gave at least 20% of their goods to God, with an extra 10% every third year; thus each family gave ~23 1/3 percent annually. This is in addition to the temple tax (cf. Ex. 30:11-16), gleaning rights (cf. Lv. 19:9-10), sacrificial offerings and other benevolent giving (cf. Neh. 10:32-33).

3 Some argue that “tithing” ought to be normative for all believers. However, the “tithe” is only referred to three times in the New Testament (cf. Mt. 23:23; Lk. 18:12; Hb. 7:1-10), and each of these instances provides no direct teaching on giving.
How We Should Give
Once we determine why and what we should give, the question of “how” must be addressed. Here are four biblical principles informing how we should give – regularly, intentionally, cheerfully, and humbly.

First, we should give regularly. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “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.” (1 Cor. 16:2) Throughout the New Testament we see the church gathered on Sunday (cf. Acts 20:7; Hb. 4:9-10), and Paul instructs the church to give when they are gathered each week. This does not mean that we have to give monetary offerings each week, but it does mean that our giving should be regular (perhaps as often as you are compensated).

Second, from 1 Corinthians 16:2 we also see that our giving should be planned – “put something aside and store it up…” Similarly in 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul writes, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart…” Paul twice tells the Corinthians to think about and plan for their giving. Intentional thought and deliberate planning should accompany our giving. We are not to merely show up and give out of impulse or simply offer what we happen to have in our pocket. God is most honored when we take deliberate time to think, plan and pray about our giving.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7 we find a third principle for how we should give – “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Paul said the Macedonians gave “of their own free will” (8:3). We are not to give begrudgingly or with an attitude of obligation, but willingly and cheerfully. With a proper understanding of the gospel comes one who freely and cheerfully gives.

Fourthly, our giving should be done with humility. Jesus taught us, “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Mt. 6:3-4). We do not give to impress others, but in humility knowing that we are seeking to worship God alone through our giving.

Where We Should Give
Finally, we need to ask the question “Where should we give?” Numerous Christian charities and other worthy non-Christian organizations appeal to believers for support. How are we to decide where to give our money? Though Scripture does not explicitly address this question, it does provide wisdom as to how Christians can give responsibly in a biblical manner.

1 Timothy 5:8 says “if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” So most foundationally we are to meet the needs of our immediate family. So after meeting that obligation, where should we give?

To your spiritual family, the local church. In Galatians 6 Paul writes “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor…Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (6, 10; cf. 1 Cor. 9:11; 15; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). There is a biblical priority of supporting the gospel ministry of your local church. The local church is God’s chosen vehicle to build up believers and faithfully proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth; therefore, its members should joyfully support the God-ordained work of the church as they seek to actively engage the mission of God.

After supporting your immediate family and generously giving to your spiritual family, you are free to give where you find genuine need. It may be a Christian para-church organization or a specific individual in need or a secular organization that performs valuable work (e.g. a pregnancy support center). In each these instances we must seek to steward God’s resources with wisdom and integrity.
Summary
Our generous giving is based on the character of our God and the greatness of the gospel. We give not out of compulsion, but as a joyful, cheerful act of worship magnifying the worth of our God. God's word does not provide a set percentage or amount for each person to give. Rather, we are to give regularly and sacrificially out of what God has given to us. We must ensure that we meet the needs of our immediate family and support our spiritual family, the church, before giving to other organizations. Remember, God has entrusted to us the privilege and responsibility of stewarding His resources to build up the church and advance the gospel so that all people might delight in the supremacy of Jesus Christ!