



## **12 TRAITS OF A BIBLICAL CHURCH – Part 6**

### **Biblical Giving**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you or somebody around you does—let me invite you to open with me to Acts 2. We’re actually going to camp out in 1 Corinthians 16, but I want to start in Acts 2. I want to you and remind you of Secret Church that’s coming up this Friday night. Just to give you a picture of how that ministry started, many years ago I experienced underground churches in a particular country in Asia. We studied the Word in secret locations for about 12 hours each day. We’d start in the morning and go until midnight—or even sometimes after midnight. When I came back home, I wondered to myself why we don’t spend that kind of time in the Word and prayer for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

So I said, “Let’s try it, just one Friday night from 6:00 to midnight and see who comes.” Now years later, we have 50,000 people who will gather via simulcast in countries all over the world to dive into the Word from 6:00 until midnight. I’m not promising you won’t doze off at different points, but I hope this year—as we’re praying for our persecuted brothers and sisters in one particular country—that you will see all the things that claim to be truth in the world that are not, according to God’s Word, as we look at counterfeit gospels.

Today we’re jumping back into our series on “12 Traits of a Biblical Church.” Our aim in this series is to open our Bibles and ask one question: Who does God say we should be and what we should do as His church? We don’t want to do church according to our thoughts or traditions or how everybody else is doing it—or even what the culture around us says is the way we should do church. We don’t want to do church according to the latest trends. We want to do church according to God in His Word.

Up to this point we’ve looked at four traits:

1. Biblical preaching and teaching—how the proclamation of God’s Word drives everything we do as a church.
2. Biblical evangelism—the proclamation of the gospel, the good news that God has made a way for us to be saved from our sins through Jesus.
3. Biblical discipleship—how God has specifically designed the church to be the field in which we grow as disciples and make disciples.
4. Biblical prayer—how prayer is fundamental, not supplemental, to what we do.

We took a quick hiatus from this series—one week for Easter, and then last week, with some heroes of faith visiting us, we paused and looked at the idolatry of comfort and safety in our culture and in the church.

On a side note, I want to tell you a couple stories from last week that I never could have planned. Nobody ever could have planned these. Our initial plan was to dive back into this series, but then knowing that Gracia Burnham was going to be here, I realized we needed to go in a different direction and talk about the idolatry of comfort and safety in our lives, as well as in the church.

Two quick stories. First, there is a family who comes to church here but who was actually in California last weekend with a sister, brother-in-law and their kids. Long story short, the brother-in-law had suddenly left his wife and kids, and the family was broken. On Sunday morning, they decide to be part of a worship service on line. The word I got was that the adults were leaning toward Charles Stanley, but the ten-year-old girl in the family requested McLean Bible Church. So, no offense to Charles Stanley, they turned on McLean and watched Gracia's story of forgiveness of the Filipino people who had killed her husband.

That afternoon, the husband who had left, came back and because of Gracia's testimony last Sunday, the wife had strength to forgive her husband. They're now working toward reconciliation. Now it just so happens that this family is Filipino. Hah! You can't write that script. God has the whole thing rigged.

Then the other story: I was down here in front after the 11:00 gathering, and a first-time visitor came up to me with her ten-year-old son. They're from Afghanistan and she starts to tell me her story. Her husband was martyred for his faith in Afghanistan, which recently brought them to the United States. With tears just pouring from her eyes, she said, "It meant so much to be reminded that, in Christ, death is gain."

May the Spirit and the wisdom of God lead our worship every single week. What we're doing is not routine or normal or natural. What happens when we gather together for worship as the church is supernatural.

Talking about idolatry of comfort last week leads right into this next trait of the church: biblical giving. I say it leads right in because if you were to ask me to identify the three idols that I as a pastor am most concerned about in the church today, one would be the idolatry of sex, which plays out in all kinds of ways. That's part of why a couple weeks from now, on Mother's Day, Lord willing, our plan is to see what God's Word says about biblical womanhood in a day of total confusion. Then, Lord willing, we'll do the same on Father's Day for biblical manhood.

The second concern would be the idolatry of comfort and safety, which we talked about last week. And third would be the idolatry of money, which is why biblical giving is such a critical trait of the church. Now, as soon as I say “giving,” I realize some of you stiffen up and don’t want to hear this.

I’m coaching Isaiah’s T-ball team, which by the way is a sanctifying experience. God is using those four- and five-year-olds to develop all sorts of patience in me. Yesterday while out on the field, I was talking with one of the other dads and asked if he goes to church. Immediately, he told me how much he dislikes pastors talking about giving and money. I was smiling inside, thinking, “If this guy only knew what I’m preaching on tomorrow.” Then he went on to say that he just wants a pastor to preach from the Bible. I said, “I agree with that!” It sounded like he’s been burned by pastors who weren’t preaching the Bible. I understand where he was coming from, but here’s the deal: If a pastor is going to preach the Bible, then he has to talk about money, because the Bible talks a lot about money in over 2,300 verses. I’ve got so much material here—we can go to midnight tonight and we’ll just be getting started.

God apparently wants us to talk about money, so I want to be crystal clear. My goal in the next few minutes is not to raise money for the church. I’m not about to give a donor pitch. I’m not up here doing a fundraiser, trying to cajole people into giving to a cause. Yes, the Bible gives us a picture of regular giving to the church. But my primary concern is not to help us meet our budget. That’s important, but I have a much, much, much greater concern. That concern is not for the church budget. That concern is for your heart.

I trust we realize, brothers and sisters, that we live in one of the wealthiest places, not just in the world, but in the history of the world. I know we may not always feel wealthy—partly because whenever we think of wealth, our minds usually go to people who have more money than we have. It’s helpful for us to realize if we have clean water, sufficient food and clothes, a roof over our heads at night, access to medicine, a mode of transportation—even if it’s public—and the ability to read a book, then relative to billions of people in the world, we are incredibly wealthy.

Economics professors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert talk about how the standard of living essentially common among us is extremely uncommon in human history. They write, “At no time in history has there ever been greater economic disparity in the world than at the present.” Then, speaking specifically about present-day Americans, they conclude that by any measure, we are the richest people ever to walk on planet Earth. We need to realize that whenever most people in the world hear “wealthy,” they picture us.

My aim in mentioning this is not to make anybody feel guilty. The Bible nowhere says that wealth in and of itself is a sin. God never says that simply having money is sinful. At the same time, we do need to hear what the Bible does say.

First Timothy 6:9-10 says, *“Those who desire to be rich (this isn’t even just the rich; this is the desire to be rich) fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”*

God says in James 5:1-3, *“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.”* That’s strong language!

Jesus says in Mark 10:23, *“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”* Do you hear that language? We almost always think of wealth as a blessing. “I’m so blessed to have this and this and this.” Do we ever stop and think it actually can be a barrier? That’s what Jesus is saying. Wealth can be a barrier to the kingdom. Wealth can keep you out of heaven.

My greatest concern, when we talk about money, is not your money but your heart. Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 6:21, *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* That’s a frightening verse for Christians in our culture. Do we want to know where our hearts are? Look at where we’re spending our money. That’s where our hearts belong.

All this to say this is why I am about to preach on money and giving without any hesitation or apology, because this is a heart issue for every single person in this room. As your pastor, I am concerned for your hearts, especially in this culture—and my own heart, for that matter. God is concerned for our hearts, which is why He doesn’t stay silent on money. He speaks, and we need to listen.

It’s ironic, that as some of the wealthiest people in the history of the world, we don’t want sermons on money. We need to hear from God far more than we need to hear from any financial expert or counselor. So we open His Word, and when we do, we see that biblical giving is critical to our lives and to our life together as a church. It’s been this way ever since the beginning of the church. Let me show this to you.

I mentioned we’re going to get to 1 Corinthians 16, but I have you here in Acts 2 because you’ve got to see this in the very beginning of the church. Beginning in verse 42, picture the scene:

*<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Did you see that? Right in the middle of this first picture of the church, we see people selling possessions to help those in need. From the very beginning, the church was marked by sacrificial giving to one another. Today, our capitalistic ears perk up and we ask, “Is this socialism? Is this communism? Is that what you’re preaching?” That’s not at all what this is. This is not some forced distribution scheme. This is brand new Christians with the Spirit of Christ in their hearts seeing needs in people’s lives and voluntarily saying, “If I sell this over here, I can help that person.” And they do it.

This is not an isolated situation. Turn over to Acts 4, starting at verse 32:

*<sup>32</sup> Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. <sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.*

Did you hear that? “*There was not a needy person among them...*” Why not? Because people were selling their houses and land, bringing the money to the church. That’s awesome!

Now turn over to the main text we’re going to look at: 1 Corinthians 16. In this passage, Paul is writing a letter to the church at Corinth. He’s telling them he’s coming to visit and when he gets there he’s going to take an offering they’ve collected to the saints in Jerusalem. That’s because the church in Jerusalem was struggling in the middle of famine. Listen to what he writes, beginning in verse one:

*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.*

Based on this simple text, I want to show you the basics of what God’s Word teaches about giving in the church. I will several verses from all over the Bible, but my prayer is that in the next few minutes this text and the truth of God’s Word will land in your life, right where you’re sitting. I know there are all kinds of people here with us: retirees, kids, professionals, singles, marrieds, some with kids, some without. There are people who are doing well financially. There are people who are really struggling financially.

Regardless of where you are on that spectrum, I invite you to listen with an open heart to the truths of God's Word as they apply to your life, right where you are, whether you're in elementary school, a retiree, or anywhere in between. What is God telling us about giving through His Word? We're to think in terms of six questions: who, what, when, where, why and how, however we'll look at this in a little different order. We'll start with the "why."

## **Why do we give?**

I think we need to start with why followers of Christ give. Why would we give to the church? I think this passage shows two reasons why we give.

1. We give as an expression of our worship. Notice in 1 Corinthians 16:2 that this instruction to give was intended to happen on the first day of every week. We know that's a reference to Sunday, the day when the church gathered for worship. That means the moment we take up an offering in all of our worship gatherings. We're not just doing that because it's convenient or it's our tradition or it's what we've always done. We do that because God's people have been doing that ever since the beginning of the church. When the church started 2,000 years ago they started taking up a collection as part of worship.

When you think about it, it's a pretty powerful picture that are easy to miss. If we're not careful, the offering times can seem like a mindless routine. That's not what it's supposed to be. Get the picture. Here we are, gathered together in different locations—in such a wealthy part of the world—and in the middle of our gathering we take time every single week to pause and say, "God, You are Lord over our money. You are so much more valuable than our money so we gladly give it to You in worship. You are greater, more satisfying and more wonderful than anything money can buy us. We honor and praise and glorify You by giving money for the purpose of honoring and praising and glorifying You."

In the midst of a materialistic world, we set aside our money every week, saying, "We don't worship it; we worship You." That's potent in a wealthy culture; it's also potent in an impoverished culture. Underground house churches that are struggling in so many different ways, including physically, are still setting aside money every week and saying, "We worship You with our giving."

So we give as an expression of our worship to God.

2. We give as the overflow of God's grace. Look in verse three. Do you see that simple word at the very end, "Carry your gift to Jerusalem"? In the original language of the New Testament, that word is *charis*—the Greek word for grace. The word translated "gift" is grace. That's important because this passage is not talking about an obligatory offering we take up in the church. It's not, "Okay, now it's offering time. Everybody had better put something in," as if you have to or you should feel guilty if you don't.

No, the picture is that we want to give, because God's grace is compelling us to give. This is grace. We give because we're all overwhelmed by the grace God has given us on so many levels. Ultimately, it's because we're overcome by God's grace in the gospel. If you're not a follower of Christ in this gathering, I want to invite you to pay close attention here. Please know that we are glad you're here. We also want you to hear why we give in the church. Christians don't give because we have to; we give because we want to. We are not giving because we think if we give everything is going to go well for us in return, as some TV preachers promise. The Bible never promises that.

So why do we give, you might ask. We give because each one of us have sinned. We've rebelled against and turned away from the Creator of the universe, deserving separation from Him forever in hell. But this God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to come to earth to live the life we could not live—a life of perfect obedience. Then although He had no sin to die for, He died the death we deserved to die. He paid the price for our sins on a cross. Then He rose from the grave. He conquered the enemy we could never conquer—death itself. Simply because we put our trust in Jesus, by His grace He has forgiven us of all our sins and He has given us eternal life.

So now it just makes sense to give offerings of our money to God every week when we gather together. We're overwhelmed by His grace. Along these lines, if you're not a follower of Jesus, we invite you to put your trust in Jesus today. We invite you to receive the grace God has made possible for you. He has brought you here to hear the good news that salvation from sin is a free gift from Him. God does not forgive you of your sins based on what you do for Him but based on what He has already done for you. God has made a way for you, in Jesus, to be forgiven of all your sins and receive eternal life with Him—now and forever. We invite you to receive that gift today!

Let this soak in. The Creator God of the universe has brought you here today and is inviting you to be restored to a relationship with Him forever. That's good news. And when you receive that kind of grace, it will transform everything about you—including the way you spend your money. It's not that once you become a Christian you will have to start giving your money to the church or the needy. Instead, once you become a Christian, you will want to start giving your money to the church and the needy, because the grace of God compels you to give.

So Christians—those of you who are followers of Jesus—are you giving as an expression of worship and the overflow of God's grace in your lives? Which leads us to the second question.

### **Who gives?**

Who is supposed to give? The answer in this text, based on all we've seen, is pretty clear: every follower of Jesus is called by God to give. Verse two: "*Each of you is to put something aside...*" This is not a letter written just to the members of the church with certain economic standing or financial position. It's not saying, "Some of you are wealthy, so you need to give." No, this is for everybody.

We know that in the Corinthian church there were members at both ends of the economic spectrum: some very poor, some very wealthy. But the Bible says, “Each of you should give.” It makes sense, doesn’t it? The same grace has saved each of us and the same God rules as Lord over all of us—. When you think about this passage, it’s pretty bold, isn’t it? In verse one, the Apostle Paul talks about how he was directing the churches in Galatia to give. Now he’s directing the church at Corinth to give. If you’re in the church at Corinth, you might be thinking, “Who are you to tell me what to do with my money? That’s pretty bold, isn’t it?”

Or think about this sermon today. Here I am, saying to a room full of Americans with the rights and freedom to do whatever you want with your money, and I’m standing saying, “Give to the church.” You might be thinking, “Who are you to tell me what I should be doing with my money?” And the answer is you don’t give because I said so. You give because God says so in His Word.

As we’re about to see, God has instructed His people to give like this from the very beginning of their existence. Whatever God says, His people are to obey. This is what it means to be a Christian, to follow Christ as Lord. That’s why we will keep coming back again and again and again to the reality that being a Christian is not just making a one-time decision in your life, then going on with life as you knew it before. That’s not biblical Christianity. Don’t be deceived.

I know that this, and sermons like last week about idolatry and comfort, go totally against the grain. They cause us to think, “We’re going to have to do this and this, giving up these things.” The whole point here is to help us see that being a Christian is following Christ as your life. Your whole life belongs to Him, which means all your possessions belong to Him. All your plans and your dreams and your kids and your everything belongs to Him. We’ve been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). We’ve died to ourselves. That’s what it means to be a follower of Christ. So stop playing games with this principle. That’s not what God has called us to do.

Every follower of Christ gives because He is Lord. We do what He says. Whoever you are in this room, if you are not compelled to give to the church, that is probably a sign you need to examine if Christ is really in you. Which leads us to the next question.

### **Where do we give?**

I use the language of “not compelled to give to the church,” because Scripture teaches we give to and through the church. Let me show you this in our passage. As I mentioned, this specific offering was for the saints in Jerusalem, having been collected in the church at Corinth. Some think the language here is talking about each person saving up their money at their own house. But based on Paul’s instruction at the end of verse two—that everything should be collected by the time he gets to Corinth—it seems clear that each person would bring their gifts every week to the church, which would then set aside the gifts for

this specific purpose. So there's a priority here on giving in the church at Corinth for the church at Jerusalem. The picture is clear: we give to and through the local church.

This is pretty different than we often think about giving. Sometimes we have the idea today that we're all on our own in this Christian life. It's as though the individualism in our culture is infiltrating Christianity. We just give however and whenever we want, kind of like lone rangers. It's not wrong at various times, for various reasons, to give outside the church. It's certainly not a sin.

Full disclosure: Heather and I give some to specific ministries and causes beyond our church here. But not primarily. Our first giving is here, because when you read the New Testament, you see a clear priority on giving to the church for ministry through the church.

Think about Acts 2 and 4 that we read earlier. What were those early Christians doing? They were selling possessions, homes and lands, bringing their offerings to the church. They were pooling their resources together for purposes far greater than anyone could do individually—and that fueled unity in the church. I wish we had time to go into how this promotes unity in the church. It's not just unity in one church, but unity between churches—like the church at Corinth and the church at Jerusalem. They were like family. God hasn't called His people to be isolated givers. We give together, then we decide together how that money is to be used. This is why we as a church vote together on a budget at the end of the year. That's not tradition; that's our attempt to align with the picture we see in God's Word.

I would mention as an important side note that the church must prove itself responsible for handling these gifts in a way that honors God and the purposes for which those gifts were given. When Paul says in verses three and four that he's going to send those whom the church chooses by letter to carry this gift, he's saying they need to send this gift in the hands of responsible members who will carry that gift to Jerusalem. That's really important. We all know there are far too many examples today of money misused by churches in our culture and we need to be responsible, not just in what we give, but how those gifts are handled and who's handling them.

That's why we have clear processes in place here at McLean to make sure the money people give is used for the intended purposes. That's biblical and right. We must do that.

So we give to and through the church for the support of the church, for the spread of the gospel, for the relief of the poor—in all these ways.

### **When do we give?**

The Bible tells us we give regularly. In verse two Paul says, "*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside.*" As we discussed, the expectation here is that followers of Christ would give every week when they gather together with the church. That's not to say that if your paycheck

comes in every two weeks or every month, that you are biblically required to space your giving on a weekly basis. But there is a clear pattern here.

Don't miss the picture of what the Bible expected of these early Christ-followers. And there are implications here for us today, specifically that God calls us to give regularly. We don't just give when a particularly emotional appeal comes our way, or when a particular bonus lands in our lap, or on a sporadic basis, like when we feel like we can do it.

Regardless of what our income situation looks like, from a student to a professional to a retiree, we should regularly put something aside to give. And parents, may I encourage you to show this by example in your lives and foster this in your kids' lives. With any resources they have, how can they be giving regularly so it's a built-in pattern?

All this leads to another big question.

### **How much do we give?**

The only phrase we have here is in verse two, "*Put aside something and store it up, as he may prosper.*" This shows that Paul obviously knew that different members of the church had prospered in different ways financially, so they should give accordingly. But what is that "something"? How much should we put aside?

It's at this point that people who have been in the church or have read the Bible for a long time might ask, "What about tithing? Are we supposed to tithe 10%?" People have asked that question ever since the beginning of God's instructions way back in the Old Testament. We don't have time to look at all the verses about this, so this is just a summary of Old Testament giving. We see in the Old Testament, the first two-thirds of the Bible, that tithes were to be given according to God's Word to support God's people.

One thing we have to keep in mind is that Old Testament Israel was somewhat unique, because they were not just a spiritual community like the church today. They were also a political nation. So some of the funds they collected were more similar to our taxes today. And yes, it totally hit me that we are walking through this text on April 15th. That was not planned. That's just another example of the Spirit of God at work.

When you read the Old Testament, in Leviticus 27:30, you see where God commanded that a tithe—that is 10%—of all the production of one's land and flocks should be given to the Lord. Those gifts were used to support the priests and Levites who worked with the temple (Numbers 18:21-24). But then in Deuteronomy 14:22-23, we see another tithe that was taken to support festivals and celebrations among God's people. So that was a second tithe, a second 10%.

Then when you get to Deuteronomy 14:28-29, every third year another tithe was taken, another tenth that would be distributed, not just to the Levites, but to the poor, the marginalized, the stranger, the fatherless and the widows. So when you add all this up for the people of God in the Old Testament, you actually had two tithes given each year, about 20% of their income, and then another tithe given every three years. So the average total came to about 23% per year. But even that wasn't the total of their giving. That was only a part. We're just getting started.

Now, don't get suspicious here. This was not just your pastor trying to use some Old Testament math to increase giving. That's not what this is. I'm just telling you what's here. It's just straight facts.

The Old Testament also describes "first-fruit offerings" that were given to present the best before God. Leviticus 19 talks about land that bears fruit and the initial yield of that land should be given to God. Basically it was an offering of the best and the first, right off the top. Exodus 23 and 34 talk about giving out of the first annual production of the grain, wine, olive oil and wool. Numbers 15 references giving the first part of any coarse meal as an offering. So that was first-fruit offerings.

The Old Testament also talks about "freewill offerings" that were given to offer any excess to God. These were voluntary contributions above and beyond tithes and firstfruits. You can read about those in Exodus 35-36 and Deuteronomy 12. So when you put all that together, you realize the tithe actually totaled up to about 23%, which was just a beginning point for giving. It wasn't a ceiling. Instead, there was no ceiling. There was all kinds of giving above that.

All these tithes and offerings had a purpose. God was training His people to put Him first in their lives. Giving like this affected their perspective on everything, because they were constantly reminded that the first, the best, the last and everything in between ultimately belongs to God. God used these tithes to provide for His people. This is how God provided for the priests and the worship life of His people. This is how God provided for the poor and the needy.

In the end, these tithes were reasons to celebrate all of God's blessings. When you think about giving in the Old Testament, don't imagine some dutiful, dreary set of offerings that just weighed down God's people. Listen to Exodus 36, describing freewill offerings for the tabernacle:

<sup>3</sup> And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, <sup>4</sup> so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, <sup>5</sup> and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." <sup>6</sup> So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, "Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, <sup>7</sup> for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

Don't you love this? Moses had to tell the people of God to stop giving, because they were giving too much. That would be a great day at McLean. "Okay, folks, stop giving. We're not going to take an offering today, because we have too much." May it be so!

That's Old Testament giving in five minutes. Then you turn to the New Testament and what do we see? We do not see a specific command in the New Testament to tithe. The closest thing we have are Jesus' statements in Luke 11 and Matthew 23, where he encourages religious leaders to tithe and more, which leads to what we do see. Instead of a tithe, we see many examples of giving that go way beyond the tithe.

Jesus says in Luke 12:33, "*Sell your possessions and give to the needy.*" In Luke 18:22 He tells one man to sell every single thing he has. In the very next chapter, a new follower of Christ gives away over half his possessions. In Acts 2 and 4, they were doing just what Jesus said to do—selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds to the needy.

So if anything, when we turn from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see greater giving, not less. Which makes sense when you think about it. Remember what compels us to give: the grace of God. We give as the overflow of God's grace. So if people were compelled to give in the Old Testament in all the ways we just talked about, before Jesus even came, then after Jesus came, died on the cross and rose from the grave, wouldn't it make sense for us to give more? It wouldn't make sense for us to give less now than God's people were giving in the Old Testament.

When we look in the New Testament, there are several examples of giving that go beyond the tithe. So here's the practical pastoral encouragement that I really believe is best for your heart:

1. Seriously consider starting your giving with a tithe. Every word there is important. Seriously consider starting your giving with a tithe, with 10%. This is very different from the way we think today. Most Christians in the church, when we think about giving, think, "Okay, maybe I need to work my way up to giving a tenth of my income to the church" —as if that's the ceiling, the big goal, we're going toward.

But why would we ever think that way? Why would we say, "Old Testament giving—that's our goal"? Why is that the height of giving we would work toward? Why not see Old Testament giving as the base from which we start—after the first coming of Christ to save us from our sins?

Now, I want to be careful here. I say "consider" starting with a tithe. As your pastor, I don't want to say that God is commanding you to do something if I can't clearly point to a command in the Bible for you to do that. The New Testament doesn't give us a specific command to tithe, so this is not me saying, "God said tithe." We don't have that specific command, so I'm using the word "consider."

I also say "consider" because I know this is impossible for some people right now. But my challenge is to make it your goal to get there—as intentionally and even incrementally as possible. Don't

think, “Well, I can’t give 10%, so I won’t give anything.” That obviously misses what God is saying to your heart about giving. Some may need to take steps over time to get to the starting line.

So I say “seriously consider” starting your giving with a tithe, because tithing sure seems to honor a biblical principle that the Old Testament clearly explains—and Jesus affirms and endorses in Luke 11 and Matthew 23—and that the church has practiced historically. If you look at the early centuries of the church, Irenaeus said exactly what we’re talking about. He said, “The Jews were constrained to a regular payment of tithes. Christians who have liberty assign all their possessions to the Lord, bestowing freely not the lesser portions of their property, because they have the hope of greater things.”

A few hundred years later, Augustine said the same thing when he talked about tithing being practiced in the church. “Let every Christian render tithes, and out of the nine parts, let him give alms.” That’s giving above and beyond the tithe—exactly what we’re talking about. For the first 400 years the church considered the practice of tithing as a starting point for giving.

Let’s put this together. Tithing was required for God’s people for hundreds of years before Christ; tithing was then affirmed by Christ, then tithing seems to have guided the church for generations after Christ. It seems like this is a wise, good starting point for our giving today.

Just think about the effects of that on your heart. Remember, part of the purpose of the tithe among God’s people is to remind us that everything we have comes from God and ultimately belongs to God. Our money is not ours. None of it is. Follower of Christ, your money is not your own. It’s His to do with as He plans.

Tithing is a regular reminder that our hearts need, because we’re prone to grab it all and think it’s ours. Tithing is like a weapon in this constant battle in this culture with materialism that wages war every day in our hearts. This is why pastorally I’m saying, “Seriously consider starting your giving with 10% to the church.” Let this not be the ceiling, but the floor of your giving. Work prayerfully and intentionally to get to that point. That’s the starting line.

2. Continually expand your giving beyond the tithe. In other words, tithing is the starting block, not the finish line. So don’t think once you get there, you’re done. Instead of working our way toward 10%, let’s work our way from 10% to greater percentages. As the Lord prospers you more, resist the temptation to believe that means you need to live nicer or better or more comfortably with more luxuries. We are so programmed in this culture to think that whatever salary we make, we should live at that level—or beyond that level, above our means.

For our standard of living to rise with our salaries is a totally unbiblical concept. That is from the world, not from the Word. In 1 Timothy 6:6 we read, “There is great gain in godliness with contentment.” Scripture calls us to live at a level of contentment, then as God gives more, we are to give more. What if God gives us more, not so that we can increase our standard of living, but so that we can increase our

standing of giving? That sounds a lot more like what God is calling us to in His Word, if we'll hear and believe it. What would happen if we actually obeyed God in this?

I read somewhere that if Western Christians just practiced tithing—just the starting point—world evangelism and feeding our brothers and sisters around the world would be within reach. Just think about that in this church. If every member of this church, no matter your income, just got in the race and worked toward starting with a tithe, then expanded beyond there as we may prosper, just think what we could do for the Kingdom together in metro-Washington and around the world. And think what that would do for our hearts. We can't imagine how huge that would be.

That leads to the last question.

### **What happens when we give?**

I want to give you three quick guarantees that will happen if we give like this. I use this word “guarantees” intentionally. When any of us are looking for financial advice, we're always looking for things that are guaranteed. We want to make sure our money is going to count; that it's going to bring in the returns. So here are three guarantees for you that are far greater than any return in this world.

1. When we give like this, our hearts will be changed. Matthew 6:21 makes this clear: *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* In other words, our hearts follow our money. When we spend our money on the things of this world, that's where our hearts will be. When we spend our money on the things of God, that's where our hearts will be. Where do you want your heart to be? It couldn't be any clearer. Where do you want your heart to be?

2. When we give like this, the church will be edified and strengthened. When we give to the church and through the church, we become an instrument in His hands. Our community together will become what He's called us to be as we care for one another and reach out to the world, to those in need around us.

3. When we give like this, God will be glorified. When our hearts are changed and the church is edified, then God will be glorified. How do we fight the idolatry of money in our culture? How do we fight the love of money in our hearts? We give like God has called us to give.

Last week we discussed the idolatry of comfort and safety. We talked about surrendering our lives, kids, possessions and plans to the Lord. Then today we talked about the idolatry of money. I thought about saying, “Really, God, all my money belongs to You. I'll do whatever You want me to do with my money, my house, my lands—it's all Yours, everything I have.” This can seem hard, but I just want to remind you Who you're surrendering these things to. You're surrendering them to the God Who loves you, the God Who is so much better than anything money can buy in this world, the God Who can be trusted with your kids, your future, your plans and dreams. He's a God Who can be trusted with

everything. He's good and gracious and glorious. When you realize Who He is, it just makes sense to say, "Everything is Yours. Do whatever You want."

Do you realize how foolish it would be to coast through a casual Christian spin on the American dream, holding on to everything in this world and tacking Jesus on to it on Sundays. No! I don't want that. That's a recipe for wasting my life. I want my life to count. I want to experience God. I want to be used by Him. I want to see Him work in and through my life however He wants to. So, God, here's everything I've got.

I promise, if you say that to God, He will prove Himself faithful. He'll prove Himself to be good and gracious and loving in ways that nothing in this world can ever compare with. God help us to trust You. I in my heart I am prone to hold things back, and I'm guessing you are too. So pastorally, as we walk through the Word, let's help one another keep our focus on Him and say, "He's worthy." Let's go against the grain of the way this world thinks, trusting God according to what His Word says.

Let's pray.

God, help us we pray. We know that what Your Word says is so different than the way we think. When we hear it, there's even something that rises up in us, saying, "I don't want to hear that." So I pray that in my own heart, and I pray that across this room, we will have soft hearts to hear Your Word humbly and to trust You. We pray specifically today that You would help us give as You've called us to give.

If I can be so bold, I pray that years from now there might be many people in this gathering who look back on this day as the day when their view of finances and giving to and through the church totally changed and unlocked a whole new picture for them. I pray that You would make us the church that You have designed us to be, by Your grace, through Your Spirit and Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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