

The Seven Pillars of Christian Growth

Part 6 – The Fifth Pillar – Giving

We are continuing in our series on The Seven Pillars of Christian Growth.

First pillar – God’s Word

Second pillar – Serving

Third pillar – Evangelism

Fourth pillar – Worship

Fifth pillar – Giving

First, I need to say that it’s not unusual when teaching on giving for someone to say, “Did you know that giving involves more than just money and possessions?”

Yes, I know that – but we’re already covering that in our other pillars.

For instance, serving, evangelism, worship, are all aspects of giving.

It’s also customary when talking about giving to teach on tithes and offerings.

And that’s valid and very important.

Only 3% of churchgoers tithe.¹

I think that most, if not all of our church, already understand these principles.

So I’m going to cover tithing very quickly, so we can look at other things.

Let’s start with some basic questions:

1. Why should we tithe?

Isn’t tithing an Old Testament principle?

Absolutely, so as New Covenant people we use this Old Testament principle as a guide only.

We use it as a guide because the Old Testament often gave only the minimum requirements.

For instance:

In the Old Testament, adultery is bad; New Testament – thinking it is as bad as adultery.

In the Old Testament, murder is bad; New Testament – anger is as bad as murder.

In the Old Testament, an eye for an eye; New Testament – turn the other cheek.

In the Old Testament, love your neighbour; New Testament – love your enemies.

In the Old Testament, no false oaths; New Testament – no oaths, tell the truth all the time.

In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices; New Testament – Christ, the perfect sacrifice.

Can you see that the New Covenant raised the bar in every instance?

So if want to live under the New Covenant, tithing is just going to be a guide to better things.

Tithing is a lower standard than New Testament giving.

So throughout this message, when I talk about tithing or giving, I’m talking about the higher standard of New Covenant giving.

2. Where does the tithe belong?

Mal 3:10 “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse...”

Where is the storehouse? Where the people are fed.

Translated into New Testament terms, it's talking about where people get their spiritual food – in church.

This principle continued on into the book of Acts when the people brought their offerings and laid them at the apostles' feet.

If I am not part of the governing body of the church, is it my job to worry about how that money is then spent?

Yes, and no.

If there's dishonesty, gross negligence or gross mismanagement, then I have a responsibility to God.

If that's the case then I should look for another storehouse.

But in the absence of those extremes, then I need to remember that I'm not giving my money to a man – I'm giving to God.

And He will hold His stewards responsible for what they do.

Okay, those are the basics – now I want to get on to some things I think will encourage you.

1. There is a blessing for faithful givers.

Mal 3:10 “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try 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 such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

I believe it is a principle of God that if we give, God will also bless us materially.

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

ILLUS – Your cereal comes in a great big box, but when you open it, and you puncture the bag, all you can hear is phhh. That's the sound of air escaping from a half empty packet. But when God gives, He gives pressed down shaken together, and running out all over.

But I don't want us to get locked into the idea that blessing from God is only money.

I've said on a number of occasions that I'm a wealthy man.

I don't have a million bucks, I don't have a huge investment portfolio, and I don't have much superannuation.

But God has blessed us in ways that really count, a happy marriage, good friends, an awesome church, good health, understanding of God's Word.

I am truly blessed, and that makes me a wealthy man.

But sometimes I think that when God doesn't give us financial release immediately, we need to focus on how blessed we really are in so many other ways.

2. God blesses Kingdom-minded people.

2 Cor 9:7-8 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, **may have an abundance for every good work.**

What does God give us abundance for? Every good work.

Doing the work of the Kingdom.

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

ILLUS – About 1982, I was Music Director of a large church, and my wife, Allison, was Choir Director. We had about 30 singers and 15 or so musicians. And I realised at the time that we needed a decent stereo – but we didn't have a lot of money. (We need money, but money has never been our goal – serving God has. Eph 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us). I remember saying, “Lord, it would be really nice to have a decent stereo”. We never

said anything to anyone. A couple of weeks later we got a call from someone in our church who wanted to see us. He said that the Lord had told him to give us an expensive brand new stereo.

The key to God's provision is doing God's will.

God's will is God's bill.

3. God wants us to be givers so that we can be like Him.

God Himself is the Master Giver.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

What did God do as a result of His love? He gave.

Generous giving is a major component of godliness.

And what did God give? His best.

ILLUS – When God looked at the condition of the world, he didn't look around heaven and say, "Hey, you! Yeah you, you're not doing much around here. I've got an assignment for you."

God gave His best.

That's why: (Prov 3:9-10) Honour the LORD with your possessions, and with the **firstfruits** of **all** your **increase**; (10) So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

"Firstfruits" is a key word.

It's the reason that Allison and I have always calculated our giving based on our gross salary.

"All your increase" are also key words.

They are the reason we calculate our offering based on our salaries, social security payments, money we find, money we are given for birthdays, money I inherit, dividends, if we're given something and later sell it, or make a profit in any way.

Because it says: Honour the LORD with your possessions, and with the **firstfruits** of **all** your **increase**."

ILLUS – My daughter was once given a ticket to a corporate box in a horseracing event. She's not a gambling person, but the owner of the box gave her \$20 to bet. She chose a horse, and won \$87. How many of you can guess what the first thing I said to her was? "Don't forget to tithe on it."

God says, "all your increase".

4. God wants to deal with our selfishness.

ILLUS – At the age of 2, my daughter called all teddy bears and other soft toys "diddles". Once at church, along came another 2-year-old named Megan, who promptly stole her diddle, and ran off through the crowded church auditorium. How many of you think that my daughter sat there and thought, "It's okay"? Not on your life! She chased after her as fast as her little legs could carry her, calling out, "Diddle, diddle, diddle..."

Inbuilt in all of us is a sense of property, a sense of ownership, a sense that it's all ... mine!

I'm the same: My house is mine, my car is mine, my money is mine – it's all mine, mine, mine.

But the problem is that it isn't mine.

Who does it really belong to? The Lord.

But my selfishness gets in the way.

ILLUS – Selfishness is a disease, and part of the cure is giving.

Now you might say, "Pastor, I really want to be a New Covenant Christian in my giving. But I genuinely can't afford to."

That brings us to our next point.

5. God uses giving to grow our faith.

This is how it goes: For the purposes of argument, I'm leaving God out of the equation ... for now.

ILLUS – Let's say I earn \$100 per week, and all my expenses come to \$98. I need that much to live, which only leaves me with \$2 per week. But I want to be obedient to God. And I'm thinking that if Old Testament is 10%, I want to do better than that because I want to be a New Covenant giver. So I'm going to give 12% which equals \$12. My equation looks like this:

$$\mathbf{\$100 - \$12 = \$88.}$$

I can't afford to do that, because I need \$98 to live.

But remember what I said? I said I was going to leave God out of the equation.

If I put Him in, my equation looks like this:

$$\mathbf{\$100 + \text{God} - \$12 = ?}$$

Who knows the answer to this equation? You can't calculate it because it contains an unknown factor – God.

Mathematicians call this a variable, because it could be anything.

But even though I don't know the value of this variable, I do know this:

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

$$\mathbf{\$100 + (\text{Matt 6:33})^{\text{God}} - \$12 = \$88+}$$

One hundred dollars, plus Matt 6:33 to the power of God, minus twelve dollars, equals \$88 plus.

In other words, God's going to provide my needs.

But can anyone else besides me foresee a problem with this equation?

Here's the problem: For me to be able to put God into the equation, I need faith.

When someone says, "I know God wants me to give, but I can't afford to."

They don't have a mathematical problem, or a money problem.

What they've got is a faith problem.

Our weekly giving is only the beginning: there's giving to one another, giving to missions.

The goal of New Covenant giving is to live a generous lifestyle.

¹ George Barna as related by G.F. Watkins