

HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

A Needed Return to Joyful Generosity

Selected Scriptures



LET'S BEGIN HERE

For too long, Christians have regarded serving Christ as a heavy *burden*. Because that attitude is so widespread, Christians often put on grim, gloomy, whipped, and weather-beaten faces when a pastor mentions the word *serve*. Many consider service to be nine parts sacrificial duty and only one part joyful privilege, especially when asked to serve by giving money. Just the mention of *giving* makes some recoil. Rather than responding with joy, Christians often respond with defensiveness, reluctance, even feelings of being pressured to give. Strangely, it is as if people think their money is *theirs* rather than the Lord's . . . as if being urged to give is offensive, rather than a plea for mere obedience. We need to give with joyful generosity—as did those cheerful givers in the Bible.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Statement Worth Considering (2 Corinthians 9:1–7)

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Ever wonder where that phrase originated? Jesus said it, of course (Acts 20:35)! That alone makes that statement worthy of our consideration. We don't have to read too far back into the history of the early church to see wonderful examples of Christians relishing the joy of hilarious generosity.

A Quick Glance at Two Churches

God's attitude about giving is concisely expressed in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. That gracious attitude became operational in a relationship between the church at Corinth and the church in Jerusalem.

2. Biblical Examples of Cheerful Givers (Exodus 35:20–24)

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible include examples of hilarious generosity in action that literally come alive before our eyes!

From the Old Testament

Having freed His people, the Israelites, from bondage to Egypt, God desired a place to dwell with them and offer His presence. Through Moses, God



Quotable

You can't think of the word hilarious without smiling. That's the idea behind hilarious generosity. The Lord loves it!

— Charles R. Swindoll



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commanded His people to give generously to the building fund for the tabernacle and to draw resources from the possessions they had taken from the Egyptians.

Also, in Nehemiah 2 we witness another opportunity for God’s people to give of both their time and their talents to help rebuild the broken-down walls of Jerusalem. Did Nehemiah use guilt or coercion to motivate people to give? Absolutely not! He didn’t have to, because the people gave willingly and generously to see the walls of Jerusalem rise again!

From the New Testament (Matthew 2:1–2, 10–12)

The giving of the valuable gifts of the wise men from the East represents the principle of hilarious generosity in the lives of men who, at enormous personal cost, traveled from a foreign country to bring their gifts to the Christ child. They were not in any way forced to do what they did, but rather, willingly and with eagerness they presented their gifts to the Lord.

And their giving became an act of worship as they “saw the child . . . and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests” (Matthew 2:10–11).

Another example of hilarious generosity in the New Testament is Onesiphorus—a close companion and fellow servant of the apostle Paul, who gave sacrificially of himself in order to participate in the spread of the gospel. In the case of Onesiphorus, however, the generosity that marked him was a generosity of spirit as he poured *himself* out on behalf of Christ and the church (2 Timothy 1:16–18).



LET’S LIVE IT

It’s fairly simple for us to write a check, even a sizeable one, especially if we’ve been entrusted with significant resources. It’s a much weightier prospect, though, to *spend ourselves* and to do so joyfully, willingly, and without hesitation. That all comes down to the heart.



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Four principles emerge from the biblical passages we've looked at in this message that will help us keep our hearts soft and responsive to the Lord with hilarious generosity.

1. *Reflect on God's numerous gifts to you.* Our attitude toward giving cannot help becoming more gracious and joyful as we consider where we would be apart from God's generous gift of grace in Christ!
2. *Remind yourself of His promise to reward generosity.* Like everything else in the Christian life, giving to the Lord becomes an issue of faith—believing that God will do as says He will do for anyone who trusts Him and obeys His Word. The Lord loves those who give cheerfully and promises to bless all who freely give with hearts of gladness and joy.
3. *Ask some probing questions as you think about the value of generosity.* Evaluation proves to be a healthy exercise for ensuring we are staying on top of our giving and maintaining the proper attitude toward the Lord. For example, we might ask ourselves such questions as . . .

Am I becoming more or less generous as I grow older?

Does my giving match God's blessing in my life?

Have I prayed about the level of my giving, or is my giving all impulsive?

4. *Change whatever keeps you from being a generous follower of Jesus.*

The ideal model of hilarious generosity is Jesus! In fact, the generosity of Jesus is what brings people to repentance and into a right relationship with God (Romans 2:4)! Because of His generosity in giving Himself, we can experience the joy of giving everything to Him in worship and in faith.



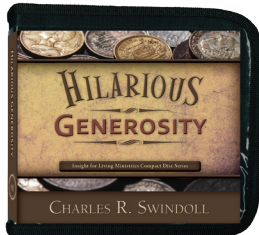
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HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

Contentment, Generosity, and You

1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Life itself isn't all that complicated; we *make* it complicated. By focusing on non-essentials instead of essentials, we lose our way and forget our priorities. When we compare ourselves with others, we never measure up. When we take our cues from our culture, enough is never enough. When we strive for more, always more, our level of stress reaches unhealthy extremes. Mix together these complications and nonessentials, and contentment sprouts wings and flies away. So many of us live in squirrel cages of never-ending pursuits. The results are tragic: disappointment, dissatisfaction, and self-centeredness. When steeped in these pursuits, we start telling ourselves things that aren't true, such as, "If I only *had* more, I would give more." That statement alone reveals a lack of understanding. Becoming a faithful and generous follower of Christ does not depend on our *accumulation* of money as much as it does on our *attitude* toward money. (Pause and reread that statement.) As we will discover in this lesson, the less we depend on material things to make us happy, the more likely we are to model generosity.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

Hilarious generosity begins with contentment. It's being satisfied with and grateful for all we have and are able to experience. We must understand what contentment is . . . and what it is not. So let's take some time to dig a bit deeper into the biblical definition of *contentment* and discover ways to hang on to it in a world that works so hard at taking it away.

Contentment Analyzed (1 Timothy 6:6, 17–19)

The most formalized biblical teaching on contentment is embedded in Paul's words to Timothy in the context of encouraging wealthy Christians not to trust in material possessions.

In that instruction, the seasoned apostle linked contentment with godliness, elevating contentment to the highest virtue.

The net gain of combining a commitment to godliness while fostering a genuine sense of contentment brings about great spiritual, emotional, and physical benefits expressed through a generous and spiritually prosperous life!



Quotable

Contentment keeps you from chasing fads and fancies that promise more and more fulfillment but deliver nothing.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Contentment, Generosity, and You

1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19

Here are some lessons we learn from Paul’s instruction to those who are wealthy.

Lesson one: *Guard against pride.* Few things are more intolerable than a person who has much wealth and parades it for all to see.

Lesson two: *Don’t find security in wealth.* We mustn’t trust in our money. We’ve all watched the stock market rise and fall and riches vanish like morning dew.

Lesson three: *Maintain the right perspective.* All things are given by God for us to enjoy and to use to benefit others, for His glory.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

What Contentment Really Means

The Greek root of the word “content” is *arkeo* and suggests the idea of sufficiency, that something is enough. When what we have—including our financial status, material possessions, and physical appearance—is enough, then we are free from turmoil over our lot. This Greek word conveys the idea of being genuinely satisfied with what we have and what we are experiencing. Our maintaining an attitude of contentment safeguards us from the inevitable stresses that result from the never-ending striving for more. Jesus celebrated a remarkable example of contentment one day while in the temple!

While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box. Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”
(Luke 21:1–4)

Contentment cannot simply be mustered. Rather it is formed within us by God’s Spirit.

Contentment and Possessions

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he was concerned for the Christians who tended to overinvest in earthly possessions while trading off the benefits of contentment. He wanted Timothy to remind his congregation that earthly possessions are temporary and of no lasting value.



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1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19



LET'S LIVE IT

Generosity rooted in contentment helps us keep focused on what's really necessary for ourselves—and for others. Generosity also helps us avoid serious snares that can entrap us in genuine heartache and potential ruin.

In contrast to those who understand the value and benefits of contentment are those who live with the express goal of amassing more and more wealth. The apostle Paul leveled a stern warning for anyone determined to tread down such a slippery and disastrous slope.

But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:9–10)

First, *we are to use our money for worthwhile causes*. We will benefit greatly from taking the time to sit down and prayerfully consider how to use the resources the Lord has blessed us with for worthy causes.

Second, we are to *balance giving money with giving ourselves*. Being generous with our time and our talent can greatly benefit others in need and usher into our lives a flood of joyful experiences.

Third, we are to *stay ready to share*. Rather than developing a suspicious edge in regard to sharing our resources, we can ask the Lord to prompt us to give to things that matter eternally.

Fourth, we are to *invest in eternity's future*. Paul urged Christians to invest in a future beyond this present life on earth (1 Timothy 6:19).

It really is more blessed to give than to receive!

So why not go there? God is not a pleasure squasher but a pleasure provider! And He simply desires that we not fix our hope on the uncertainty of riches . . . but rather put our hope in Him, the One who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.

Remember, the net gain of combining a commitment to godliness while fostering a genuine sense of contentment brings about great spiritual, emotional, and physical benefits. In other words, by embracing both godliness and contentment, the believer develops a greatheartedness expressed through a generous and spiritually prosperous life!



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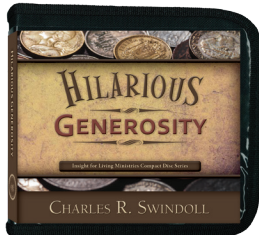
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Contentment, Generosity, and You

1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19



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HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

Timeless Principles of Money Management

Selected Proverbs



LET'S BEGIN HERE

One of the reasons people love and respect the Bible is that they find its truths not only resourceful but always relevant . . . *trustworthy* and *timeless*. With reliable accuracy, its counsel never fails to provide the information we need when we lack understanding. Whether we are single or married, younger or older, wear a hard hat or a top hat, are self-employed or climbing the corporate ladder or retired from that pressured, stressful world, God's Word provides wisdom found nowhere else in literature . . . and not just wisdom but *inspired* wisdom. The book of Proverbs is chock-full of it! Regardless of the subject, the writer (often, Solomon) cuts through the mumbo jumbo and spells out solutions or clarifies issues we still wrestle with today. Expressed in ways that are easily understood, some of the most helpful counsel has to do with managing our money wisely. Let's not overlook a single nugget of wisdom hidden in the treasured book of Proverbs.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Four Important Facts Regarding Proverbs

Before turning to the verses that specifically address money, it will be helpful to consider a few facts about Proverbs in general.

First, *the book is ancient, but its contents are timeless*. God's wisdom for living, like God Himself, never changes. Proverbs speaks to us in our world today just as poignantly as it spoke to people who needed wisdom for living in Solomon's day.

Second, *the chapters are difficult to outline, but the verses are easily understood*. Proverbs was not written in narrative form—it's not a developing story like Genesis or Acts. Rather, it's a collection of poetic maxims that address practical living.

Third, *the topics are numerous and varied, but each subject is helpful*. For example, the topic of money is scattered throughout Proverbs; there's no single section that deals with money. The best way to study a topic in Proverbs is to look up that subject and related key words in a concordance, which is an alphabetical listing of words in Scripture. Then spend some time exploring each of the Scripture references listed for those words. There is much to be gleaned from that type of approach to discovery, no matter the topic in Proverbs.



Quotable

*We have the joy
as God's people to
give to His work—
with confidence
that He loves us
regardless of
the amount.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

Timeless Principles of Money Management

Selected Proverbs

Fourth, *the proverbs are packed with wisdom but rarely consulted*. If we were regularly to consult the book of Proverbs and take to heart its money-management principles, we'd use our money more wisely, avoiding traps such as credit card debt and overextending financially or pursuing get-rich-quick schemes; and we'd grasp the value of generosity rather than maintaining a stingy attitude toward giving.

2. Six Timeless Principles Regarding Money (Proverbs 3:9–10)

Emerging from the many chapters and verses in Proverbs that deal with the topic of money are six timeless principles worth exploring. Let's take a close look at each one.

Principle one: *Those who honor God with their money are blessed by Him in return*. In an earlier lesson, we discovered how much delight we bring to the Lord when we give willingly and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Principle two: *Those who make money their passion lose more than they gain* (1 Timothy 6:10). (See also Proverbs 15:27 and 23:4–5.) When our passion is the pursuit of more money, we can be guilty of greed—the opposite of contentment. And it's the *love* of money that is at the root of all evil.

Principle three: *Wisdom gives needed guidance for handling wealth*. For instance, when considering a new career opportunity that will require a great deal of energy and time, we must seek the Lord's wisdom before accepting. Higher pay grades and more esteemed status do not necessarily equal God's best for us.

Principle four: *Increased riches bring increased complications*. Many people believe that if they had unlimited wealth, they could do whatever they want, whenever they want, without distraction or a care in the world. Not so, said Solomon! Just look at some of the problems Solomon described that can accompany wealth.

- *A false sense of security* (Proverbs 18:11; 22:2)
- *Many new "friends"* (14:20; 19:4)
- *Pride and arrogance* (16:18; 18:23; 28:11)

Principle five: *Money cannot buy life's most valuable possessions* (15:17; 22:1–6; 28:6).

Principle six: *If handled wisely, money can bring great encouragement; if mishandled, great stress* (13:22).



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LET'S LIVE IT

The Bible tells us that the manner in which we handle our money is a barometer for gauging our spiritual health. Jesus knew the rich young leader would never embrace Him until the man was willing to let loose of his earthly possessions (Luke 18:18–25). Peter detected right away the spiritual condition of Simon the sorcerer because the man saw money, not the Spirit, as the way to spiritual power (Acts 8:18–24). And Paul? We've already learned how he felt about money: True believers who name the name of Christ should give willingly and generously to spread the gospel and build the church (2 Corinthians 9:1–15).

How have you handled financial decisions or job change decisions in the past?

Did you seek the Lord for wisdom? What did that process look like?

The ultimate question we must ask ourselves is this: *Are we walking in obedience to God in our giving?* Giving God's way is a matter of obedience.

Solomon wrote,

**Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the best part of everything you produce.
(Proverbs 3:9)**

We are to give our best to the Lord, willingly and cheerfully—not only our money but our time, our gifts and abilities, our ideas and imaginations, and our ministries. And the blessings that come our way are too numerous to list, but they are certain.

Maybe the best way to manage our money, then, is to allow the Lord to manage our hearts. To offer to Him full control and final authority in every aspect of our lives. No matter how we do the math, our first order of business is to walk with Christ.



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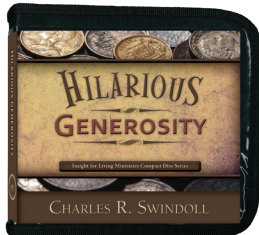
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HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6–15



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The journey toward grace is the ultimate *trip to bountiful*. The outcome, no matter what it may be, is always characterized by bountiful abundance. When grace fuels us to forgive someone who has offended us, we abundantly release every hint of any offense. When grace is cultivated in our relationship with a friend, an abundance of bountiful freedom marks our friendship. The same abundance occurs when God reaches down to us. Though our sins are many, they are never greater than the bountiful abundance of His grace. The apostle Paul put it this way: “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20 NASB)—or, as Donald Grey Barnhouse once paraphrased it, “Where sin reached a high-water mark, grace completely flooded the world.”¹ The same bountiful abundance occurs when grace is the motivating factor prompting our giving. Rather than giving grudgingly, we give cheerfully. Instead of giving under compulsion, we give spontaneously, privately determining the amount God leads us to give. In doing so, we claim by faith that whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. In other words, living by faith includes giving by grace.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Applying Grace to Living

The movement of grace into our lives impacts each of us as Christians through a threefold motion: *grace stoops*; *grace replaces*; and *grace guides*.

First, *grace stoops to where we are to lift us up to where we ought to be*. God, in Christ, declares us to be righteous, in spite of our dreadfully unrighteous state. The opening of John's gospel declares, “The Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing [grace] and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son” (John 1:14).

Second, *grace replaces the harsh demands of the Law and offers mercy in its place*. Grace is seen most clearly in the work of Christ in accomplishing salvation for His people (Romans 8:23).

Third, *grace guides us in responding to God and to others*. Grace implores us to move in humility and graciousness both toward God and toward others.



Quotable

When we live our lives by grace, we look beyond what is and see what could be. We do that when we give as well.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6–15



DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Spotlight on Generous Giving: The Macedonians

When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth on the topic of generous giving, he shined a spotlight on the gracious Christians from the churches in Macedonia.

Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. (2 Corinthians 8:1–2)

Paul founded the churches in Macedonia on his second missionary journey. Believers in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea would have been included in this group of hardworking, generous believers. Though nestled in a prosperous area overlooking the sparkling Mediterranean Sea, these believers, according to Paul, were “being tested by many troubles” and were “very poor” (8:2). Remarkably, in spite of their poverty, the church in Macedonia erupted in a flood of “rich generosity.”

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul tapped into the spirit of competition by invoking Macedonia—Corinth’s longstanding political and socioeconomical rival to the north. The Greeks and the Macedonians had a “lengthy political rivalry” dating back to long before the time when Philip of Macedon forged a fragile union between the two regions in 338 BC.²

Nevertheless, Paul made the point that the Macedonian Christians’ level of generosity and joyful giving surpassed that of Corinthian believers—though the Corinthians were significantly more well off financially (9:7)!

2. Applying Grace to Giving (2 Corinthians 9:6–15)

An attitude of willingness and cheerfulness in regard to giving flows from the work of grace in our lives. Joyfulness and generosity should be marks of Christian giving, and they produce an outward flow of . . .

- Bountiful sowing (2 Corinthians 9:6)
- Cheerful giving (9:7)
- Liberal providing (9:8–11)
- Joyful responding (9:12–14)

3. Applying Grace to Accepting

God—only by His grace—has accepted us because of Christ’s saving work on the cross. Therefore, we must then allow the Holy Spirit to complete a work in us that makes us genuinely more accepting of others and to give more generously and willingly to His work. Paul exclaimed: “Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).



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The Charming Joy of Grace Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6–15



LET'S LIVE IT

From this passage in 2 Corinthians 9, we discover that when grace is applied to our giving, people's lives will be transformed for eternity.

First, *grace compels us to see people the way God sees people: as helpless sinners in need of His mercy.* Living in a sin-sick culture is not easy for any follower of Christ. And yet, we must not allow anger or misunderstanding or even religious prejudice to cloud our vision of their real need: the need for forgiveness and grace. Grace compels us to see people as God sees them and offer to them His love and mercy, not judgment and scorn.

Second, *willingly and generously giving of ourselves and our resources provides hope for people who may otherwise never hear the gospel.* Even with all the remarkable technological advances helping to make the message of Christ more accessible across the world, bringing that message to the nations of the earth requires enormous resources and armies of talented and willing laborers. As Christians learn to embrace and respond generously and willingly to giving of their resources, time, and abilities, more people will hear the lifesaving message of His grace.

Name some people to whom you can offer grace and mercy today.

What did God do when He looked down and saw all of us in our need? He gave . . . generously, willingly, and sacrificially.

His unending grace flowed toward us in Christ, and we were redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7 NASB).

For that we thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!

ENDNOTE

1. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Grace, in Romans: Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 122.
2. Linda L. Belleville, "The Macedonian Believers Model Generosity (8:1–5)," in *2 Corinthians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Macedonian-Believers-Model>, (accessed Dec. 15, 2015).



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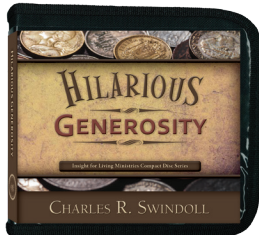
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HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

A Tried-and-True Plan That Still Works

Selected Scriptures



LET'S BEGIN HERE

For many centuries, God's people remained obedient to a financial plan that was guaranteed to succeed. This plan became the norm for all who walked in obedience to their Lord. When the Law of Moses became the Jews' guidebook for life, this arrangement became an obligation, not an option. It was known as "tithing," which is defined as "a tenth of one's income."¹ In biblical days, it would include a tenth of a farmer's crops or a tenth of the wage an employed person earned. As long as God's people were obedient and sustained their commitment to this God-ordained plan, God's favor rested on them. In addition to this plan, there were "freewill offerings" given for special projects and specific needs, which were provided over and above the obligatory tithe. While the New Testament does not include direct commands that God's people tithe, it is worth noting that we are never commanded to *not* tithe. We do find, however, references to special offerings for specific projects. These New Testament passages suggest that early Christians gave offerings over and above their regular financial giving. We could even assume that tithing was so ingrained in the New Testament believers' lifestyles, nothing more needed to be written regarding it—though, under grace, giving a tithe was no longer an *obligation* but an appropriate *starting point* for all who wished to cultivate the habit of joyful generosity. Let's examine this tried-and-true plan.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Required Plan: The Ancient Hebrews

In preparing to formulate a personal plan for giving, let's examine the practices of those who lived in biblical times. Was there a prescribed pattern of giving in those days? We can answer that question by first looking at the lives of ancient Israelites.

Tithing Practiced Before the Mosaic Law

Tithing (returning one-tenth of one's income to God) was the normal practice of giving in the Old Testament. It was prescribed in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 27:30–33; Numbers 18:26), but tithing started long before God chiseled His commandment into stone at Mount Sinai. God's people practiced tithing as far back as Abraham's day.



Quotable

*When you
put your budget
together, put
God's portion first
to make giving to
Him a habit.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

A Tried-and-True Plan That Still Works

Selected Scriptures

Tithing Required Under the Mosaic Law

Though the Hebrews were obligated by the Law to tithe, God never intended tithing to become a mere act of duty. Let's take a look at another passage in the Old Testament.

“I have given them the Israelites' tithes, which have been presented as sacred offerings to the LORD. This will be the Levites' share. That is why I said they would receive no allotment of land among the Israelites.” (Numbers 18:24)

The Hebrews, then, not only showed their obedience to God by tithing, their giving provided for the Levites.

2. A Similar Plan: Century-One Believers

As the New Testament opens, God's people are struggling under the heavy burden of “pharisaism” —the stringent, Spirit-choking interpretation and application of the Law. Jesus' ministry of grace and freedom came as a refreshing balm to those weary from the strain of guilt imposed by pharisaic legalism.

Though Jesus renounced the pharisaic method of tithing (among other things!)—which had become heartless, legalistic obligation (Matthew 23:23–24)—He never rescinded tithing as a legitimate method of consistent giving (5:17). In fact, money was crucial for the survival and functioning of the early church.

Systematic Giving Expected (1 Corinthians 16:1–4)

The apostle Paul didn't prescribe a percentage of gross income. Yet he did support the deliberate, consistent setting aside of funds for the work of the ministry—in this case, helping the church at Jerusalem.

Spontaneous Offerings Encouraged (Acts 2:43–45; 4:36–37)

Just as Israel supplemented their tithes with one-time gifts for special projects, so the early church supplemented their systematic giving with special offerings.

3. A Joyful, Generous Plan: Christians Today

Giving is a very personal matter—it comes down to our individual relationships with the Lord. That's why Paul exhorted the believers at Corinth (and all of us too!) to “each decide in your heart how much to give” (2 Corinthians 9:7). It comes down to a matter of the heart . . . it comes down to how we live out our confidence in the Lord.



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LET'S LIVE IT

From these principles of giving found both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, some overarching applications seem fitting for all of us.

First, *giving a tenth of our income is a very good place to start*. Starting with a tenth of our annual income, then dividing it by 52 weeks or 12 months provides an excellent starting point in developing a consistent giving plan that not only puts us in line with biblical principles but demonstrates our commitment to be obedient to the Lord. Also, giving provides a powerful antidote for the toxins of greed and materialism. And it grows our faith as we trust the Lord to provide for us.

Second, *giving regularly and consistently is an excellent habit to continue*. Committing to the habit of giving helps to train us to release our resources—time, giftedness, and money—back to the Lord. Letting go of things, especially things we no longer need or that could be of much greater use to others, goes a long way in developing a sense of contentment and gratitude for what we've been given. And other people will be encouraged and helped as we do.

Finally, *giving regularly and consistently puts us on a path toward living a generous life*. God owns everything. He owns our time, our abilities, our homes, and our investments. He owns our retirement accounts, our children and grandchildren, and ultimately our futures. So why not offer back to Him, both willingly and generously, everything we have? It really is the only worthy response for those of us who have received such grace and generosity from Him.

What could you do to begin to put a regular and consistent giving pattern in place?

If God is anything, He is wonderfully consistent. Across the span of thousands of years, bridging two testaments, He has asked His people to live in submission to Him and to joyfully and generously give to Him out of the abundance of what He has given us. And that giving, God tells us, is not only a responsibility; it is an act of worship. Therefore, we as God's people are to have no more sour attitudes! No, none of that. We must reach into our treasure boxes and pull out our gifts to the Lord . . . because it is the very least we can do in return for God's gift to us in Christ.

ENDNOTE

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2007), "tithe."



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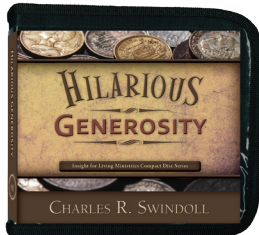
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