



ALL IN

THE CORE

GIVING

THE CORE - GIVING

Last week our focus was fasting. This week we are learning about and experiencing giving.

Giving, defined by Oxford, is freely transferring the possession of an item to someone else. Seems pretty simple doesn't it? I have something, I give it away.

Unfortunately, for some, giving is a challenge. It is one of the more difficult subjects to talk about at church. Its always hot topic. The perception outside the church is that the church is always asking for your money. Inside the church, it seems we never have enough.

Money and giving is revealing. It's one of the places in our spiritual lives where we can pull back the curtain and see an accurate portrait of where our faith is.

Because of all of this, it's good for us to start with Scripture.

What the Old Testament Says

From the first few chapters in the Bible, we see giving happening. In Genesis 4 we find the story of Cain and Abel. In the story, both Cain and Abel bring offerings to God. Cain brings some of the "fruits of the soil." Abel brings the "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." Cain brings fruit--maybe the smaller, tomatoes that weren't perfect, but Abel brings the first and the best.

This concept of giving develops more as we get farther into God's story. Throughout the Old Testament, God required the Israelites gave the firstfruits of their living back to God. That means, if you had a new goat and she began having goats, the first one was given to God. Same with your camels and your oxen and also with your grain, corn, etc.

The goal of this firstfruits offering was to help the Israelites remember that God is the one blessing them. While it was their effort in growing the crops and caring for their animals, it is God who gives growth and life. Giving the first of everything back to God helped the Israelites keep the correct perspective.

The Old Testament also references a tithe as an offering to God. A tithe is a tenth of something. Many times throughout Scripture, God tells the Israelites to give a tithe of everything from the land and from the flock (see Leviticus 27). They are also to tithe olive oil and the new wine (see Deuteronomy 14). This means that you give a tenth of each harvest. You give a tenth of the wine you make. You give God every tenth goat and every tenth ox, and so on.

There are other reasons besides growing and producing to give an offering to God. Any time God intervened to make one healthy again or gave one success, an offering was given. If you had a disease or an ailment, you gave God an offering when you were healed. On the Day of Atonement (the day every year where God took away the sins of the people) one would bring an offering for their family to God. Throughout every day and every week God required offerings to be given to him (for example, see Exodus 29).

The OT shows that God required giving in almost every facet of Israel's life. From what they produce and grow to the health and protection God gives them. God even required offerings every day to help them remember that it is God who sustained them throughout every moment of their existence.

How does this perspective challenge us today? What should our perspective about our stuff be? Take a moment to reflect on those two questions. Write some thoughts down here or take some time to reflect in your journal.

What the New Testament Says

In the New Testament, there isn't much more added to a requirement for giving. Giving is assumed. However, we can learn more perspective from some things Jesus says and from the way the early church lived.

In Matthew 19, Jesus has an encounter with a rich young man who asks what it takes to be in the Kingdom of God. Jesus asks him if he is keeping the commandments. The young man responds with a yes. Then Jesus tells him to go sell everything he has and give it to the poor. Then he will have "treasure in heaven." The young man goes away sad. I think Jesus sees that the young man finds his security in his stuff, even though he is living out the commandments. Jesus tells him to let go of his possessions so he can fully rely on God.

Shortly after this encounter Jesus tells his disciples that it will be a challenge for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God - like a camel going through the eye of a needle.

In Luke 21, Jesus and his disciples watch people put their offerings in the temple treasury. A widow drops in a few small coins. Jesus makes the statement, "This poor widow put in more than all the others. All these people gave out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

In the book of Acts, there are multiple examples of people in the early church having the right perspective on their money and possessions. The first is in Acts 2:42-47. The people of the early church were devoted to the stories/teaching of the apostles, fellowship (gathering - which we will talk about next week), breaking bread together (gathering together for spiritual things like communion), and prayer. They also, "sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

We get a similar picture in Acts 4:32. In that passage, there is a unity between everyone. They get it. They have the perspective that everything they have is not theirs. They share. They live as if God owns it.

Lets take a moment again to reflect. From these passages in the NT, what should our perspective of giving be? How do you think you need to change?

Giving For Us

Now comes the hard part. What does all of this mean for us? The best concept of giving I have ever heard comes from a message Frank gave two years ago. The idea was this: God is the owner, we are the stewards. If we keep that perspective, our stuff won't own us like it owned the rich young ruler. We will give generously, and not just "out of our wealth."

It is easy to say, but hard to do. Being generous is hard because the world continually tells us we deserve it. We are entitled to it. Fortunately, we have those who have gone before us and lived out the right perspective to follow.

So, What to Do?

Giving is an expectation for those whole lived through the Bible. If we are followers of Jesus, giving is an expectation.

The questions we want you to ask yourself are, "Where am I at with giving? What do I need to change? What is the next step I need to make?" Below are five steps¹ one can take in the core discipline of giving. Our prayer is that you have the faith and courage to be honest about where you are and that you take the next step.

FIRST-TIME GIVER

Step 1: "I have yet to give, but I'm going to break the ice."

This is someone taking the first step in generosity, in trusting God for the first time, who decides to give something.

CONSISTENT GIVER

Step 2: "I give occasionally, but I'm going to give regularly."

This person decides to give something, and to give it on a consistent basis. This often requires planning, and sometimes this might be a reason for someone to set up recurring gifts online or to become disciplined with giving through regular envelopes or checks. It becomes a habit, a discipline that helps you grow in discipleship.

INTENTIONAL GIVER

Step 3: "I give regularly, but I'm going to commit to giving as a priority."

This type of giver begins asking questions like, "Why am I giving more to my cell phone bill or cable/internet bill than I am giving to God? Should I be giving to God more than I give for my mortgage each month?" This giver starts to make their giving an intentional choice that reflects their view of God, and their commitment to build His kingdom in relation to other things they spend their money on. What if I committed to God as the #1 priority, and that governed all other financial goals?

¹ The five steps are taken from southpointbeyond.com/the-beyond-journey

SACRIFICIAL GIVER

Step 4: “I give as a priority, but I’m going to give so that it requires a change in my lifestyle.”

This type of giver begins to ask the question, “Am I giving in a way that changes me...that causes my lifestyle to be different to reflect the transformation Christ is making in me?” That commitment to giving actually governs the rest of their lifestyle, and is larger than their current situation so that they have to adjust the rest of their expenditures to meet that commitment. They’re no longer giving whatever they feel they can, but stretching BEYOND what they’re currently able by sacrificing something. Sacrifice means giving up something I love for something or someone I love even more. I cannot become Christlike without learning to sacrifice, and certainly the Body of Christ is worth sacrificing for.

LEGACY GIVER

Step 5: “I give now, but I want to give BEYOND my lifetime.”

A Legacy Giver is no longer asking the question, “God, how much are you asking me to give?” A Legacy Giver is asking the question, “God, how much are you asking me to keep?” They ask this so that they can release the rest into Kingdom purposes. Much like a Sacrificial Giver makes a commitment that will govern their monthly and annual decisions, a Legacy Giver makes a lifetime or longer-term giving commitment that governs their larger decisions like homes, cars, investments, and the like. They may set a cap on their lifestyle, so that anything the Lord gives above that, they’re free to give away.

The Next Step I Am Going to Take Is....

DO YOU WANT MORE???



CORE TRAINING: SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Our Worship Minister, Wally Lowman, will be leading a 4 week class/discussion on Spiritual Disciplines in February. We will look at prayer, fasting, journaling, and Bible reading. If time allows, we will look at other spiritual disciplines.

The class will meet in the Fireside Room on Wednesday evenings from 7pm to 8pm. RSVP by emailing coretraining@seekstudyserve.org or by calling the church office.



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