

Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know About Giving (But Were Afraid to Ask)

Rich Nathan
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The Generous Life Series
Malachi 3.6-12

There is a great story I love about President Lyndon Johnson's great-grandfather, George W. Baines, who was a 19th century preacher. On the wall of Johnson's White House office was a framed letter written by General Sam Houston in the middle of the 19th century.

Photo of Sam Houston

Baines had led Houston to Christ and the General was a changed man. He was no longer vulgar in his speech, or quick to pick a fight. He became a really peaceful man, very content with life. After General Sam Houston was baptized which was an incredible event for anyone who knew him – he was the last person anyone ever thought would be baptized as a Christian – he offered to pay half of Pastor George Baines' salary. When someone asked him why, he said, "My pocketbook was baptized along with me." Sam Houston demonstrated the reality of his conversion by a change in the way that he gave his money.

Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, once said:

There are three conversions necessary for every human being: the conversion of the mind, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the wallet.

One of the hardest subjects to talk about in the church today is not sex or politics, not race or immigration, or any other hot-button issue you can think of, but money. How we Americans handle money is way more private for us than our sex lives. I've been a pastor for 27 years here. During that time, I've had hundreds of people talk with me very openly about their sexual lives and sexual sins. Folks have talked with me about pornography addictions and adultery and premarital sex and same-sex attraction. But I can count on one hand the number of people who in 27 years have revealed their salaries to me, or what they gave. Our income and our spending are considered absolutely private in America.

Richard Foster, in one of his books, talks about two psychologists who would speak openly and frankly in front of their children about sex, death, and all kinds of other difficult subjects, but they would go into the bedroom and close the door when they

wanted to talk about money. In the 21st century, frank, open conversations about our money and our giving are absolutely taboo subjects.

And this is true for those not only outside the church; it is true for people in the church.

I once talked with a Christian financial advisor. He said to me, “Rich, Christians come to me looking for financial advice. And many of them have more money than they will ever need. They come to me looking for ways to increase their wealth. But they get incredibly touchy and very defensive when I even hint at putting together a plan for giving some of their money away.”

We seek financial counsel to increase our wealth, but we don’t seek financial counsel to put together a plan to increase our giving. The bottom line is that we American Christians think that there are no rules, there is no guidance, God has very little to say about our relationship to our money and our giving. We treat money as an area in which we are all free to do whatever we feel is right in our own eyes. Basically, with respect to money – especially how much we choose to give or not give, how much debt we take on – it is a free for all. C.S. Lewis, my favorite Christian author, said 60 years ago:

God is a “transcendental Interferer”

In other words, God has the annoying habit of sticking his nose into our private business. Maybe you’ve noticed this if you have a personal relationship with God. Not everyone here feels like they have a personal relationship with God. But many of us do feel that way. And maybe you’ve noticed this about God; that what is so annoying about God, and I say this with all reverence, but what is so annoying about God is that he constantly shows up and speaks to us about things like our temper, our holding grudges, our weight, our sex lives, and our money even when we didn’t ask for his advice about any of these things.

In fact, if you decide to start a personal relationship with God, you are going to discover that he pops into your life like an uninvited guest even when you turn off the outside light, put up a “no trespassing” on your fence, taken in the welcome mat and bolt your front door. God is, according to C.S. Lewis, and according to anyone who has ever entered a real relationship with God, God is a transcendental Interferer who constantly sticks his nose into business that we consider to be entirely private like how much of our money we choose to keep and how much we choose to give.

Since the New Year I’ve been doing a series on Generous Living. Today I want to talk about generous giving. I’ve called today’s talk “Everything You’ve Ever Wanted to Know About Giving (But Were Afraid to Ask).”

Malachi 3:6–12 (NIV)

6 “I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. 7 Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

8 “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty. 12 “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

What’s so important about giving?

This portion of the Old Testament was written by the prophet Malachi. Malachi was likely the last prophet in Israel for over 400 years until John the Baptist began preaching in the wilderness by the Jordan River in Israel.

Now, the call that God makes to his people through the prophet Malachi was for his people to return to him.

Malachi 3:7–8 (NIV)

7 Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

8 “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings.

The picture is that God’s people are walking away from him and the call is to turn around, to do an about-face, switch directions 180°, I’m heading back to God. The image is reminiscent of Jesus’ famous story of the Prodigal Son who ran away from his father, went to the far country where he spent all of his money on partying and wild living, found himself in a pig sty one day, came to his senses, and turned around. He got back on the road that led to his father.

So often people say, “I’ve asked God’s forgiveness, but I still feel guilty. What should I do?” The question we need to ask is have we turned around? Or to use the biblical

term, have we repented? If I keep doing the same thing over and over again, I'm going to keep feeling guilty over and over again.

The issue of turning back to God, doing an about-face, repenting is more than words. It involves a behavioral change. It is like a marriage where someone keeps hurting their spouse in some way. It is not enough to shed crocodile tears and beg forgiveness. If you really want to be reconciled there's got to be a real change in behavior. You need to start helping around the house. You need to go to counseling for your anger. You need to go into recovery for your alcoholism.

In this case, what was the behavioral change that God was looking for to get his people back on the road to him? He wanted more than words, more than religion. What was the specific issue that God was putting his finger on and saying, "This is the way that you are going to repent and prove that you want a relationship with me?" The specific behavioral change that God was putting his finger on had to do with his people's giving. Let's look at v. 7 again.

Malachi 3:7–10 (NIV)

7 ... "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'

8 "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (NIV)

Why does God talk with the people about their money and giving? It is because what we do with our money is fundamental to the whole direction of our lives. Jesus said,

Luke 12:34 (NIV)

34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

You've heard of the seven deadly sins – three of the seven deadly sins relate directly to the problem we have with money and giving. We are afflicted by envy, or what the Bible calls "covetousness."

ENVY

We want what other people have and we do whatever we can to get it, even if it means going into debt or cutting corners, or holding back on our giving.

We are afflicted by greed.

GREED

We have an intense desire for more. We never have enough. And that means we don't want to give away what we have.

And we are afflicted with gluttony.

GLUTTONY

We keep consuming even when we are full, even when all of our needs are met, to the point where we make ourselves sick and unhealthy.

What we do with our money and giving determines the direction of our lives, Jesus says. Giving is a direct assault on deadly sins in our lives – things like envy, greed and gluttony.

Here is the first question we want to know about giving, but are afraid to ask:

How much should I give?

Let's look at v. 8-10:

Malachi 3:8-10 (NIV)

8 "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (NIV)

God says to his people, "You are robbing me when you don't give me a whole tithe." A tithe literally was one-tenth of people's income. God says, "You are robbing me when you spend the tithe that you should be giving to me on yourself." Now, this is a really shocking accusation. Imagine God saying to you, "You are stealing from me." Of course, the only way we could be stealing from anyone is if we've taken what belongs to them. And that's what God is saying, "You're talking about what belongs to me."

There is a basic assertion in the Bible that life is a gift from God and everything belongs to God. Our capacity to acquire wealth is a gift from God. Our houses, our bank accounts, our cars, our bicycles, our retirement savings, our laptops and iPads, and phones - all the stuff we have in our houses, apartments, dorm rooms, garages, or storage lockers – all that we claim to own belongs to God.

There is a great book written by John Ortberg, the title of which I really love:

Cover Photo of When The Game Is Over, It All Goes Back Into The Box

We say to our kids, “OK, when you get done playing, put all the pieces of the game back into the box.” Ortberg says when we get done playing the game of life, everything we are goes back in the box – a box that is 84” long, 24” wide, and 23” deep, a box that is the size of an average coffin. When God takes back this gift of life and the game is over, it all goes back in the box.

God owns everything, but he generously says in the Bible, “I’m giving you 90% of what you earned to meet your needs, to meet your family’s needs, to invest, to help others, but so that you will remember that it all belongs to me, don’t touch 10% of your income! Give it back to me. Because if you don’t, you are robbing me.

How much should I give to God? Let’s look at the text again.

Malachi 3:10 (NIV)

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Give a whole tithe

We ask, “Do I really have to give God at least 10% of all my income? 10% of all of my wages? What if I give God only 5%? That’s a lot of money. Or what about 3%? Or 1%? What if I give God money only on the rarest occasions? Isn’t that good enough? I obey God in other areas. I pray, sometimes. I thank God for my food, when I remember. What if I give God less than 10%?”

I hate to sound crass, but some of you might ask, “How little can I give and still get into heaven? How much can I keep for myself and spend on me and my family and still be a Christian?” People ask this all the time. After all, we’re sinful and fallible. We all fall short in various ways. What is the absolute minimum we need to do and still get into heaven? Give me the bottom line. Almost everyone who has ever thought about Christianity has asked the question like this at some time or other. What’s the least amount I can do and still squeak in? Still cross the threshold?

But if we put this question in any other context, it would be absolutely laughable. I mean imagine, husbands, if you asked your wife, “Darling, what is the least amount that I need to do in order to still stay married to you? What is the least number of times I need to tell you that I love you? How little can I do around the house to help? How many affairs can I have? How far can I go before you divorce me?” Would anyone say

that kind of attitude would make for a healthy marriage? Or how about if we asked our friends: “How many times can I offend you? How many lies can I tell to you? How much can I gossip about you? How much will you put up with from me before you stop being my friend? What is the absolute minimum I can do and still have you call me your friend?”

When we start thinking about the minimum we can get by with, we’ve moved outside of the realm of relationship. We’ve moved outside of the realm of friendship. We’ve moved outside of the realm of love. We’re now in an entirely different realm – the realm of grudging obligation, legalistic counting, something that has nothing to do with being a Christian. Because being a Christian has to do with being in a relationship with God; being a Christian has to do with friendship with God; it’s a love relationship with God. It’s not about the least you can do to squeeze by.

Folks raise all kinds of objections to tithing.

Objections to tithing

Is giving at least 10% of our income back to God something that applies to God’s people living today?

Isn’t tithing for people living in Old Testament times?

The issue of tithing did not begin with the giving of the Old Testament law at Mt. Sinai. We find tithing way back in the story of Abraham, who upon winning a battle and rescuing his nephew from an enemy king, gave a tithe of all that he has to a priest named Melchizedek. Tithing, in fact, was rooted in the ancient Near East principle that when a king conquered a land, 10% of all of the produce of the land belonged to the conquering king. Tithing is a kingdom principle. What God says by requiring a tithe is that “I am the King and I have bought you with the blood of my Son, Jesus.”

As RT Kendall, the great Christian preacher and scholar wrote,

Tithing was so deeply imbedded in the Jewish conscience, that it needed virtually no mention in the New Testament.

Tithing was an assumption in Israel when Jesus came on the scene. Here is what Jesus says in Matthew 23:23:

Matthew 23:23 (NIV)

23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Jesus doesn't say to the Pharisees, "You're so dumb. You're tithing." Jesus doesn't make fun of the Pharisees tithing. He said, "You ought to do that." Tithing ought to be in the context of justice and mercy and faithfulness.

Is giving 10% of our income to God just an Old Testament principle? Can we get away with doing less today? Let me put it this way. Imagine if you hired someone to wash the windows of your house for \$200. You came back home and they said, "I've got all the windows done; but, I noticed while I was washing the windows that some of your screens were torn and I repaired them. I also cleaned out from under the eaves and I cleaned your gutters." Would you say to them, "Well, you did what I asked you to do; in fact, you went so far beyond what I asked that I am going to give you less money. I'm going to pay you only \$50." Even if we said tithing was an Old Testament principle, giving 10% of our income to God is an Old Testament principle, we who have the light of the New Testament, who know that God sent his Son into the world to reveal to us what God was like, to embody for us the way to live; we who know that God's Son suffered and died on a cross to pay for our sins; we who know God's love for us in a way that the people in the Old Testament didn't know; we who have received so many more blessings than the people in the Old Testament, should we say to God, "As the result your giving me so much more than the people in the Old Testament got, I'm going to give you less than they gave. You've done so much more for me, but I'm going to give you less." We would say, "A tithe is the minimum; I need to go way beyond this!"

You might say:

Isn't tithing for people who are established?

Some of you might say, "I'm in college. I'm in my 20's and I'm just getting started. I work part-time. Tithing is something I will do when I finally get out of school, pay off all my student loans, and get established. When I enter the adult world for real, that's when I will tithe. Tithing is something for folks in their 30's and 40's after I have a house and kids and all of that."

Let me respond to you, if you are a student, a teenager, in your 20's or 30's, you're working part time. Giving is never easy. It doesn't matter what age you are. It is always hard to tithe. Tithing is a habit that is way easier to develop when you're young than when you're older. That's why, parents, teach your kids from the time they money, or an allowance, or gifts to tithe. "Let's give 50¢ out of that \$5.00, \$1.00 out of that \$10.00 in the offering at Children's Ministry." I remember distinctly the leader of our Christian Fellowship group in college sitting some of us down who were juniors and seniors at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland. He said to us, "Listen, you're going to this great university and many of you are going to get out and make a lot of money. You've got a decision to make right now. You can determine right now how much you're going to

give and what kind of lifestyle you're going to live because your lifestyle will float up and up with every increase in your income."

I remember Marlene and me talking afterward and we made a determination that we were going to start tithing as 20-year olds. We were both working part time and we were living on very little money. We made a commitment to tithe on our income nearly 40 years ago. It became a habit.

But you say, "I'm on a fixed income. I'm struggling financially. I've got 3 kids. I don't have very much money."

Isn't tithing for the wealthy?

Listen, we have two opportunities coming up here at Vineyard Columbus:

Stewardship and Budget Workshop on Saturday, February 28th, 9:00 a.m.- 11:30 a.m. at the Cooper Road Campus.

This is a free class to teach anyone how to follow a budget to eliminate debt and to grow in spiritual aspects of stewardship.

And, the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University is going to be a home group starting March 22nd. You can find out more information about this home fellowship group that is going to go through the Dave Ramsey materials at

www.vineyardcolumbus.org

Click on Financial Ministry Events.

But if generosity is a good thing, if Jesus meant what he said when he told us that it is more blessed to give than to receive, do you think Jesus would hold the blessing of generosity back from those who are struggling financially, or those who are on fixed incomes?

I read a powerful piece from the missionary, Glen Schwartz, who talked about the damage that is often done when Christians from the West go to the majority world and teach people in the majority world that they don't need to tithe, and they don't need to give because they are too poor to do it. We'll do it for you. He said when you tell folks that you are too poor to tithe, you rob people of the blessing of making their own difference for the cause of Christ. You rob them of a sense of ownership; you rob them of a stake in God's Kingdom. Tithing gives people an ownership stake in God's kingdom.

Glen Schwartz tells a story about a church group from America that went to a poor country in the majority world. This American group decided to pay for and build a

church building for this group of folks. The Americans did all the labor. They paid for all the materials. The folks in that country were not asked to partner with the Americans, to work, or to give what they could. A couple of years later, the roof of that church building began to leak. The Americans got a letter in the mail. “The roof on your church building is leaking. You need to send someone to fix it, or your church building will be ruined.” They had no stake in that church building. They had no sense of ownership.

You, who are hourly workers, you’ve got debts, do you want to feel some stake in the church, some sense of ownership in the Kingdom of God for yourself? Then tithe.

But you say, “My problem is the opposite, Rich. I make too much money to tithe.”

Isn’t tithing for the average person?

I recall a story told by Peter Marshall, who was the Chaplain of the United States Senate for many years. He had a friend, who struggled to tithe, even though the friend made a huge salary. The man came to Pastor Marshall and said, “Listen, I used to tithe some years ago, but now I’m making \$500,000/year,” which back in the 1950’s was like \$5 million today. He said, “I used to tithe, but now I can’t afford to anymore because that would mean I would have to give \$50,000 to the church.”

Peter Marshall wisely said to him, “Why don’t we pray about this? Let’s pray.” And Marshall bowed his head and prayed this way: “Lord, will you reduce my friend’s income until he can afford to tithe again?”

You say you make too much money to give a full 10% of your income back to God? God can fix that. Just ask him to. Or instead, we can all stop robbing God.

Listen, there are some of us in this congregation, who are doing really well financially. Not everyone is, but there are some of us who are. If you are a person who says, “Rich, the truth is, my income covers all of my needs, all of my family’s needs, and I have enough tucked away for savings and retirement and for sending my kids to school. I would like to figure out a way with some others to invest in God’s Kingdom. I’m tithing right now, but I would like to figure out a way to partnership with others to invest strategically in God’s Kingdom.”

I’m going to start a group that I used to lead here at Vineyard Columbus back 7-8 years ago called Kingdom Builders.

Kingdom Builders

I led it until we entered the recession. That group was able to do incredible things. We supported forty indigenous pastors in Indonesia, many of them from Muslim backgrounds, to plant churches throughout the Muslim nation of Indonesia. We helped

to plant churches along a tributary of the Amazon River in Brazil. If you are someone who says, “Rich, by God’s grace, my needs are covered. I’m tithing.” I would love to get together with a group of men and women and strategically figure out together what we can do to really make a difference and to invest in the Kingdom of God. Just drop me an email and I will give you some details regarding when our group might meet. Here is my email address:

Rich.nathan@vineyardcolumbus.org

You write to me and tell me that you might want to participate.

I’ve been asked over the years as I’ve taught this principle of tithing, “Rich, should I tithe on my net or my gross.” I always answer this way: I can only tell you what Marlene and I do. We have tithed on our gross for years. My reasoning is very simple. Many of the deductions that are taken out of my paycheck benefit me and my family – my health insurance, my retirement, and the taxes that I pay. They don’t benefit God’s Kingdom. Our goal is not get by with as little as we can give. So I say this with all affection, if you are wondering about net or gross, or how much should you give to God, pray about it. And with an open heart ask God, “Am I robbing you? Should I be giving more?” I’ve discovered in my own life, friends, the things I don’t want to hear from God about, I don’t pray about.

If how much should I give is the first question, here’s the second question we’re afraid to ask about giving:

How should I give?

It is important that when we give to God, we give off the top of our income. There is a principle in the Bible of giving the first fruits of all of our income to God. Here is what we read in Exodus 23.19a:

Exodus 23:19a (NIV)

19 “Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.

Why firstfruits? Because, obviously, they’re first. The way the world teaches us to handle our money is this:

1. We earn our money
2. We enjoy it. Usually, we over-enjoy it, which lands us in debt.
3. We repay our debt from overspending.
4. We save for future needs once we’re out of debt.
5. We give, if and when there is anything left over.

So, after we've enjoyed our money, paid off our debt, saved for our retirement, then if we have anything left over after our contributions to our 401Ks and all the other deductions from our account, and paying for our kids' college and on and on, we give the excess to God. The principle of firstfruits tells us to invert the last four items. Here is the way that God wants us to think about our spending:

God's way of managing money:

1. We earn our money.
2. We give generously to the work of the Lord.
3. We save for future needs.
4. We repay our debts.
5. We enjoy what's left over.

There is a very easy way to know whether your conversion to Christ, if you have become a follower of Christ, has impacted the way you relate to your money. The easiest way to see whether you are handling your money God's way is to look at what happens when you face a financial crunch. If you are simply giving to God what is left over, the last portion of your income, then when you are squeezed financially, your giving will shrink because you don't have that much left over. You spent all your money on consumption and in paying off your bills. When you are squeezed economically, you will give less to God.

How should we give? Give off the top. Here at Vineyard I've taught you the principle of following Jesus over and over again and I've said to you, "Following Jesus is always a matter of putting one foot in front of the other, left foot, right foot, left foot." Wherever you are in your giving, take the next step.

If you have Never Given...BEGIN to give
If you give Sporadically...give REGULARLY
If you give Regularly...begin to TITHE
If you Tithe...to give EXTRAVAGANTLY

Wherever you're at, friend, take the next step and then don't stop there. Take the next step and the next step – left foot, right foot, left foot – as a follower of Christ. That's how you grow.

How do you give? Off the top, by taking the next step.

Listen, here at Vineyard Columbus you can give in different ways. You can give by placing a check or cash in the offering bags each weekend. If you give cash and you want a deduction, just put it in an envelope and write your name and contact information on the envelope.

You can support the church by contacting your bank and having the bank deduct a certain amount from your account every month.

But the best way to give is *to give online*.

1. Go to www.vineyardcolumbus.org
2. Click on the “Give” button
3. Follow the directions and give online!

The reason we would like to have many of you begin to give online is that it is much less costly for us to process your giving. We don’t have to handle checks, so your money goes further. And it creates stability for our church budget. Our income doesn’t go up and down with the seasons, vacations, or snow storms. Would you do that? Would you sign up for giving online?

Well, here’s the third and final question about giving that we’re afraid to ask:

Why should I give?

Listen to what God says.

Malachi 3:10 (NIV)

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

This is the only time in the Bible where we are challenged to test God. We’re always told in the Bible to not put God to the test. We say, “God, prove to me that Jesus is the Son of God by writing Jesus’ name in big letters across the sky.” “Prove to me that Jesus rose from the dead by speaking audibly to me right now.” God says, “Don’t put me to the test. I don’t need to prove anything to you.” This is the only time in the entire Bible that God says, “Test me. Do you want to know if I am a promise keeping God? Test me by giving a whole tithe.”

Why should I give?

The promise of blessing

Let’s look at vv. 9-10:

Malachi 3:9–10 (NIV)

9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me.
10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my

house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Friends, I don’t know exactly what the nature of the blessing is that God gives to people when they give a whole tithe to the Lord. I don’t know exactly today what it would mean to live under God’s curse. But even if I can’t fully define all the contours of God pouring blessing out on us, or lifting off of us or our families a curse, I know that I would rather under God’s blessing than under God’s curse. I don’t know how much the blessing of God today involves material things – an increase in our incomes, an increase in our businesses, or if the blessing involves answers to our prayers, breakthroughs in our families, breakthroughs in our relationships; I don’t know. But whatever the blessing is, I want it! I know I want God’s blessing. Don’t you?

Why should we give?

The promise of protection

Malachi 3:11 (NIV)

11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty.

Again, I don’t know what the extent of the protection is that God is promising as it applies to our lives today in the 21st century. If it is protection over our stuff, or protection over our ability to provide for ourselves and our families, or some kind of protection over us or our loved ones, I don’t know. But whatever the protection God offers from the hand of the evil one, from our own stupidity and sin, from all the ways the world is broken, whatever measure of protection that is promised for us today, I want it. Don you want protection?

Why should we give?

The promise of witness

Listen, the church is called by Jesus to be the light of the world. Jesus says you are a city set on a hill. You are the salt of the earth. What is it today that will cause the greater community of Columbus or the greater community around our world to take notice of the church? What is it that impresses the world? What causes newspaper articles to be written in praise of the church? I will tell you what it is. It is the church’s generosity.

Vineyard Columbus is frequently written about in our local newspaper. And half of the time, the reason we get newspaper or TV coverage is because the church has been unusually generous in some way. When we collected \$650,000 during the recession to help out members of our church who were out of work, or who were in danger of losing

their homes, the news covered that. When we gave \$110,000 for tsunami relief in Indonesia, the news covered that. When we gave \$130,000 to help out in the rebuilding of homes in New Orleans and sent something like 18-20 teams down to New Orleans to help, the news covered that. Recently, when our church gave \$114,000 and First Church of God gave an additional \$30,000 to rebuild the Flood Church in Ferguson, Missouri that was burned down by arsonists, Vineyard Columbus and First Church of God were on the front page of the Dispatch.

By the way, we're having a community worship service with First Church of God this next Wednesday evening.

- Community Worship Gathering with Pastor Carlton Lee
Wednesday, February 11th, at 7:00 p.m.
First Church of God
3480 Refugee Road
Columbus, OH 43232

Vineyard folks are coming together with people from First Church and we're going to hear from Pastor Carlton Lee, whose church we helped to rebuild. He is coming to town to say "thank you." So, come out for that community worship service. Many of us will be down there.

When we give, we bear witness to the community.

So, let's listen again to the promises of God. I'm going to ask you to close your eyes as I finish this message. Just apply these promises in some way to your life. If you are a person who already gives a whole tithe of your income to God, or if you are a person who says, I'm going to start doing that, these promises are for you.

Malachi 3.10-12

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. 12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Let's pray.

Everything You've Ever Wanted to Know About Giving (But Were Afraid to Ask)

Rich Nathan
February 7-8, 2015
The Generous Life Series
Malachi 3.6-12

- I. **How much should I give?**
 - A. Give a whole tithe
 - B. Objections to tithing
 1. Isn't tithing for people living in the Old Testament?
 2. Isn't tithing for people who are established?
 3. Isn't tithing for the wealthy?
 4. Isn't tithing for the average person?
- II. **How should I give?**
- III. **Why should I give?**
 - A. The promise of blessing
 - B. The promise of protection
 - C. The promise of witness